

The Revival of Mishnah Study in the Early Modern Period

David Faleck

Honors Thesis in Jewish Studies
Professor David Ruderman
Spring 2008

The composition of the Mishnah by R' Judah ha-Nasi in the late second century C.E. marked a seminal transition in Jewish intellectual life. In his revolutionary undertaking, R' Judah committed to writing generations of teachings and traditions that had been passed down and developed among the rabbis. Despite the existence of numerous other collections of Tannaitic writings, the Mishnah of R' Judah became the central, authoritative corpus for rabbinic Judaism. With its completion and redaction, it was deemed a closed book: subsequent generations of scholars, the *Amoraim*, did not have the authority to challenge the rulings codified in the Mishnah by the earlier *Tannaim*.

For the next few hundred years, the *Amoraim* in Palestine and Babylonia explicated the concise teachings of the Mishnah and their discussions were collected into the Gemara. Upon its completion in the fifth-sixth centuries C.E. and its redaction in the centuries following, the Gemara became the single, authoritative commentary on the Mishnah. Similar to the way in which the rulings of the Mishnah were sealed, and uncontestable by, the *Amoraim*, so too were the expositions of the *Amoraim* in the Gemara vis-à-vis the generations that followed. The implication of this hierarchical perspective was profound: the Mishnah could be interpreted solely through the lens of the Gemara. No longer was the Mishnah an independent work to be studied and explicated in isolation; it was now relegated to being a gateway into the revered Gemara.

What emerged in the centuries that followed was an overwhelming focus of intellectual effort and writing dedicated to the Gemara, while the Mishnah remained largely neglected. This condition of Gemara-centric scholarship prevailed through the Gaonic and medieval eras. Indeed, it was not until the mid-sixteenth century that the

Mishnah regained a place of prominence amid the vast array of Jewish literature. In this paper, we will explore first the role and status that the Mishnah occupied in the purview of rabbinic scholars before the sixteenth century. We will then present evidence of, and reasons for, the Mishnah's tremendous revival in two geographically and culturally distinct Jewish communities in the mid-sixteenth century. Finally, we will look at the aftermath of these two revivals, explore the convergence between them, and discuss their lasting effects on the study of Mishnah in the centuries that followed.

I. The Study of Mishnah: from Talmudic through Medieval Times

Through the centuries of the ascension, and later dissolution, of the centers of Jewish learning in Babylonia under the Gaonic leadership, no functional distinction was made between the Mishnah and its illustrious commentary, the Gemara; the two were treated as an organic work to be studied in its totality.

This attitude and conception of the Talmud as a single unit continued throughout the Middle Ages as well. The greatest evidence of this phenomenon is the lack of attention paid to the Mishnah as an independent entity across all the worlds of Jewish learning and scholarship. Few attempts were made to study the Mishnah independently, and it was effectively subsumed under the shadow of the Gemara.¹ Any discussion that involved the Mishnah came in the context of a Gemara commentary; since the Gemara was structured around the Six Orders of Mishnah, it was only logical to begin a Gemara commentary with a few words on the Mishnah itself.

¹ See Yaaqov Sussman, "*Manuscripts and Text Traditions of the Mishnah*" in *Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 222.

Rashi (R' Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, 1040-1105), the most famous commentator on the Talmud in Jewish history, is well known for his linear style of translation and interpretation of the text. In his attempt to clarify every difficult word and phrase in the Talmud, he began with the Mishnah and continued his glosses on the text throughout the Talmud. It is clear, however, that the Mishnah held no independent standing in the eyes of Rashi. Rather than elucidate the concepts presented in the Mishnah, Rashi often sufficed with “it is explained in the Gemara,”² i.e. the concepts and difficulties in the Mishnah will be addressed in the Gemara, and thus the reader should just look ahead to the Gemara’s discussion to satisfy his questions and curiosity. Rashi saw no need to provide tools to allow for Mishnah study independent of the Gemara, and his willingness to defer to the Gemara reflects his fundamental perception of the relationship between the two corpuses: the Gemara is the authoritative explicator of the Mishnah’s wisdom, and no alternative explanations are necessary.

A similar style, running Talmudic commentary on the Mishnah and Gemara together, was adopted by the vast majority of medieval Talmudic commentators, ranging from the Tosafists across the Ashkenazic world, to Nahmanides (R' Moses ben Nahman of Barcelona; 1194–1270) and his famous disciples across the lands of Sepharad, including Rashba (R' Shlomo ben Abraham Aderet of Barcelona; c. 1235–c. 1310), Ritva (R' Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili of Seville; c. 1250–1330), Ran (R' Nissim ben Reuven of Gerona; 1320-1380) and many others. There were virtually no attempts made to treat the Mishnah as an independent entity.

² “מפרש בגמרא”. For examples, see Rashi’s commentary to the Mishnayot on *Berakhot* 28b, 40b, 51b, 54a etc.

Throughout the Gaonic and Medieval eras, those commentaries that were written on Mishnah were limited in scope and purpose: they dealt almost exclusively with material about which no Babylonian Talmud was written. No Babylonian Talmud was written on *Seder Zeraim* (with the exception of *Masekhet Berakhot*), the order dealing with agricultural laws pertinent only to life in the Land of Israel, or on *Seder Toharot* (with the exception of *Masekhet Niddah*), the order dealing with the laws of ritual purity, pertinent primarily in the time of the Temple, nor on select tractates in other orders—*Edduyot*, *Avot*, *Middot* and *Kinnim*. As a way of supplementing the Babylonian Talmud and completing the study of the Six Orders, the Mishnayot of those neglected tractates were addressed and commented upon.

The earliest known Mishnah commentary is a compilation of Geonic material on *Seder Toharot*, explaining difficult words in Hebrew and Aramaic.³ The authors reference similar commentaries on the Mishnayot in *Seder Zeraim*, but no copy of that work survived. In the early twelfth century, R' Yitzhak ben Malkizedek of Siponto (c. 1090-1160) became the first Italian Mishnah commentator. Using a collection of sources ranging from *Tosefta* to the Palestinian Talmud to Geonic works, he too wrote a commentary on these two orders of Mishnah: *Zeraim* and *Toharot*. Like the Geonim before him, the essence of his commentary was basic explanation and translation rather than analysis; he often translated the difficult terms into the Arabic, Greek and Italian vernacular.⁴

The specific goal of these publications becomes even clearer in the case of R' Samson ben Abraham of Sens (late 12th-early 13th century). In addition to his work as a

³Chanoch Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1959), 237-39.

⁴Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 245.

leading French Tosafist writing on the Babylonian Talmud, he composed Mishnah commentaries to the orders *Zeraim* and *Toharot*, notably omitting, however, the two tractates that have an associated Babylonian Talmud: *Berakhot* and *Niddah*.⁵

Furthermore, he wrote commentaries to the tractates *Shekalim*, *Eduyot*, *Middot* and *Kinnim* as well, isolated tractates with no Babylonian Talmud, though no copies of these works survived.⁶ Further examples of this genre of Mishnah commentary serving in lieu of a Talmudic commentary on select tractates is found in the works of R' Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg (c. 1215–1293), R' Asher ben Yehiel (*Rosh*, c. 1250–1327), and R' Eliyahu ben Menahem of London (early 16th century), all of whom composed commentaries to *Zeraim* and *Toharot*. Additional isolated Mishnah commentaries were composed by Rabad (R' Abraham ben David of Posquieres; c. 1125-1198) on *Eduyot*, *Kinnim*, and various parts of *Zeraim* and *Toharot*,⁷ R' Zerakiah ben Isaac haLevi of Girona (*Ba'al haMaor*, c. 1125-1186) on *Kinnim*, and R' Shemayah, a student of Rashi, on *Middot*.⁸

Thus, despite the number of rabbinic scholars who engaged the Mishnaic text, virtually none did so on a holistic basis, commenting instead only on limited tractates. It would seem that they sought primarily to enhance the study of these neglected tractates, and to bring them into the fold of standard Talmudic material. It is in this vein that Efraim Urbach writes about R' Samson of Sens, “his commentaries remain until this day among the most important of any Talmudic commentaries, and from the perspective of methodology and approach they are essentially *Tosafot* to *Zeraim* and *Tohorot*...the

⁵Efraim Urbach, *Ba'ale ha-Tosafot*, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980), 298-311.

⁶ See Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 246.

⁷ Isadore Twersky. *Rabad of Posquières*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 106-110.

⁸ Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 249.

major and primary source in the commentary of R' Samson is 'our Talmud' [The Babylonian Talmud]. At times he merely provides a cross-reference to the Babylonian Talmud, where an explanation of the Mishnah can be found."⁹ Even more explicitly, Isadore Twersky writes of Rabad that he was "intrigued by Mishnah study because it was baffling and difficult; he wanted to supplement what the *Amoraim* (authors of the Gemara) had omitted, to elucidate the uninterpreted sections of the Mishnah, but not to detach it completely from the Talmud."¹⁰

The sole deviation from this pattern of interpretation is the famous commentary of Maimonides (R' Moses ben Maimon; 1135-1204) to all of Mishnah. With the exception of a little-known and uninfluential commentary by R' Natan ben Abraham, head of the school (*av ha-yeshivah*), written in Palestine at the end of the eleventh century,¹¹ Maimonides was the first to undertake a comprehensive commentary on the entirety of Mishnah. Written between 1158 and 1168 in Arabic, and translated into various languages over the coming centuries, Maimonides' commentary became a standard reference for understanding Mishnayot. With the invention of the printing press, Maimonides' commentary was the first to be included with a printed Mishnah; it appeared first in the 1492 edition of the Mishnah, printed by the Soncino family in Naples, and then in countless subsequent editions.¹²

In an era in which Mishnah study was not an independent pursuit, and Mishnah commentary not a typical genre, what impelled Maimonides to write his first major work

⁹ Urbach, *Ba'ale ha-Tosafot*, 299-303.

¹⁰ Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, 109.

¹¹ Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 238.

¹² Yeshayahu Vinograd, *Otsar ha-sefer ha-Ivri* [electronic resource] (Yerushalayim : ha-Makhon le-bibliyografyah memushshevet, 2006). Subsequent editions of Mishnah with Maimonides's commentary in this period were printed in Constantinople in 1505, Venice in 1546, Riva de Trento in 1559 among numerous others.

on the Mishnah? What were his goals in this composition? Aware of the unique and revolutionary nature of his work, Maimonides wrote a long introduction to his commentary, discussing everything from the chain of Oral Tradition beginning with Moses and continuing through Maimonides himself, to categorization of various *halakhot*, to the logic behind the order of the tractates. Finally, although he does not explicitly address his impetus for writing the commentary, he does describe four benefits that he believes the work will serve. Acknowledging the Gemara as the primary explicator of the Mishnah, he writes:

I saw that the Gemara informs us of matters pertinent to the Mishnah which are absolutely impossible for one to discern solely through making logical deductions from the Mishnah...Furthermore, it adds onto the Mishna's words and deletes some, and uncovers the Mishna's underlying reasons. So I proposed a work to explain the Mishnah, which, when completed, would offer four essential services:

- (1) That we present an accurate clarification of the Mishnah and explain the meaning of its words...Now, no one man has the ability to know the entire Gemara by heart...the understanding of one subject is dependent upon that of another, and so many motions, challenges and rejoinders are brought that only a man quite expert in analysis can discern a clearly defined law from the Gemara's explanation of that mishna. If so, what can one do with a law not fully explained, and for which a final decision cannot be reached, without a thorough study of two entire tractates or three?
- (2) The work's second asset is that it will note the final decisions; I will explicitly tell you according to whose opinion each law is finally decided.
- (3) Its third asset is that of serving as a guide for any beginner in the analysis of wisdom...he will be able to apply this system of analysis to the Mishna, and through it be like one whose mind incorporates the entire Gemara on it as well.
- (4) Its fourth asset is that of serving whomever has already gone through the Talmud as an aid in retaining the information he has learned.¹³

Maimonides' ambitious project, which predates his magnum opus, the *Mishneh Torah*, but foreshadows the latter in its goals and purposes, was meant to provide a work

¹³ Moses Maimonides, *Introduction to the Commentary on Mishnah*, trans. Zvi Lampel, (Judaica Press 1987).

that would serve beginners and experts alike; an easy entry point for the former, a memory aid for the latter. The aspirations of Maimonides for his work were no less than revolutionary. In the words of Isadore Twersky, “Maimonides desired to condense the rambling Talmudic explanations and distill the quintessence from the lengthy discussions. He would manipulate, refashion, and recast these conclusions and insights in the form of a self-contained commentary on a self-contained literary unit. His expressed aim was to render the Mishnah an independent cadre, which would provide a worthwhile subject of study.”¹⁴

Nowhere in his introduction, however, does Maimonides specify any particular exigencies of his time that prompted his unique composition. Although one can surmise from his introduction that Maimonides perceived a particular lack of ability and expertise in learning that confronted his generation, it is only in passing, buried within the commentary itself, that he makes this point explicitly. In his commentary to *Masekhet Mikva'ot* 4:4, Maimonides cites discussions among commentators as to the *kashrut* (ritual validity) of a certain type of *mikvah* (ritual bath.) In a biting tone, he writes how they were foolishly debating a matter that could be found explicitly addressed in a Mishnah. “And what caused this poverty,” he writes, “is the lessening of the memory of the Mishnah and the study of its contents.” Through this assessment, Maimonides distinguishes himself as one of the first figures in the post-Talmudic era to proclaim the virtue of Mishnah study and to lament its neglect. In this sense, he can be seen as a forerunner of the rabbis a few hundred years later who would champion the cause of the Mishnah and begin a revolution in its study.

¹⁴ Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, 109

In the centuries following Maimonides' work, little progress was made in the field of Mishnah study, and his efforts towards its revival were limited to moderate readership of his work alone. In contrast to his *Mishneh Torah*, which elicited countless responses, attacks and super-commentaries beginning in his lifetime and continuing for centuries to come,¹⁵ his commentary on Mishnah had no such impact.¹⁶ Although it was translated in fragments from its original Arabic in subsequent centuries,¹⁷ there is no evidence that it had a lasting influence on educational content and methodology. Twersky laments this fact, writing, "His Arabic works, including the *Mishnah Commentary*, were inaccessible to European scholars and his fame was thus automatically restricted...Ultimately the mobility of texts and ideas prevails and borders are crossed, but linguistic barriers are sometimes insurmountable; the truncated influence of Maimonides' *Mishnah Commentary*, even after its fragmentary and belated translation into Hebrew, is a regrettable fact of Jewish intellectual history."¹⁸ Despite Maimonides' lofty ambitions and revolutionary intentions for his *Commentary on Mishnah*, the work had limited impact and response in the centuries that followed.

It took more than 350 years from the publishing of Maimonides' commentary for another comprehensive commentary on Mishnah to be undertaken. In the late fifteenth

¹⁵ Isadore Twersky, "The Beginnings of Mishneh Torah Criticism," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 169-176. Cf. Twersky's *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (below, note 17).

¹⁶ Cf. Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 30-31, in which he discusses the relatively minor interest in Maimonides' *Siraj*, Commentary to the Mishnah. He notes that "Maimonides referred his respondents far more often to the *Siraj* than they question him on it."

¹⁷ In Maimonides' lifetime, R' Judah al Harizi translated the introduction and first five chapters of *Zeraim* into Hebrew. R' Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated *Perek Helek* (the famous tenth chapter of *Sanhedrin*), and *Masekhet Avot* with Maimonides' well-known introduction *Shemonah Perakim*. By request of the community of Rome in 1296, a number of Orders of Mishnah were translated as well. See Albeck, 238-9.

¹⁸ Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 19.

century, R' Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro (c. 1450-before 1516), or “The Bertinoro” as he came to be known, wrote a commentary to the Mishnah that would become a standard in Mishnah editions until the present day. While little is known about his life, especially his younger years, letters written by Bertinoro describe how he left his home in Italy in 1486 on a journey with his family to the Land of Israel. On route, he traveled through Rome, Naples, Salerno, and Palermo engaging in brief rabbinical or teaching positions, and then sailed to Alexandria and continued through Cairo before ultimately reaching Israel. Soon after, he settled in Jerusalem just before Passover of 1488, where he quickly became the spiritual leader, establishing regular courses of study and preaching in Hebrew twice a month and on special occasions.¹⁹ Although no records remain of the exact dates during which Bertinoro wrote his commentary on the Mishnah, later sources testify that he began the work while still in Italy, and completed it in sometime after his arrival in Jerusalem.²⁰

Before considering the scope, nature and broader impact of Bertinoro’s commentary on the study of Mishnah, it is helpful to note the role of Mishnah in the geographic areas in which he studied and wrote. It appears that in Italy a limited regimen of Mishnah study had been maintained throughout the years. Many of the medieval scholars who did comment on the Mishnah lived in Italy, especially in the southern region of Byzantium.²¹ In the late fifteenth century, Yohanan Alemmano (c. 1435–after 1504), a prominent Italian rabbi and kabbalist and older contemporary of Bertinoro, taught the Mishnah with Maimonides’ commentary as a part of the curriculum for children ages 4-13.

¹⁹ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition. s.v. Bertinoro, Obadiah ben Abraham Yare. See also M.E. Artom and A. David, *Me-Italyah li-Yerushalayim*, (Ramat Gan: The Jerusalem Project, 1997), 7-20

²⁰ See Gedaliah ben Joseph ibn Yahya, *Shalshet ha-Kabalah*, (Venice, 1586), 63b.

²¹ See Sossman, *Kitve Yad*, 234-6.

Nonetheless, it is just one small component of the curriculum for this age group, the last item in a lengthy paragraph describing the value of Biblical study, grammar, writing and arithmetic.²² It appears, therefore, that Bertinoro's commentary was written in a community in which Mishnah study was present, though not particularly prominent.

It is difficult to ascertain Bertinoro's exact goals in writing a comprehensive Mishnah commentary. In contrast to Maimonides, he wrote no elaborate introduction to his work and included no statement of intention or purpose for his composition. A survey of his content and style, however, points to the nature of his work as primarily a compilation of earlier works, rather than an innovative commentary on the Mishnah. The majority of his comments on the Mishnayot follow those of Rashi, often in the form of direct citations. On tractates for which there is no Gemara, and hence no commentary of Rashi, he bases his comments on the work of R' Samson of Sens, and the *Tosafot ha-Rosh* of R' Asher ben Yehiel. Additionally, he incorporates the halakhic rulings of Maimonides, and occasionally explains a Mishnah in accordance with Maimonides' opinion.²³ Even in instances in which he personally disagrees with a certain explanation, he generally cites another known opinion in opposition, rather than positing his own.²⁴ It is rare that comments can be found in Bertinoro's commentary that have no apparent precedent.²⁵

²² Moshe Idel, "Seder ha-Limmud of R' Yohanan Alemanno," *Tarbiz* 48, (1979): 304.

²³ Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 249-50.

²⁴ For examples, see *Bikkurim* 3:5 in which he disagrees with Maimonides and writes "And to me it seems etc." and sides with the Rabad (in his glosses to Maimonides.) Also *Keilim* 9:1 in which he writes "And thus seems in my eyes the correct interpretation of this Mishnah, but my teachers did not explain accordingly, but their interpretations I do not know how to reconcile, and thus I have not included it." The "correct interpretation" that he mentions here is that of Maimonides.

²⁵ For examples, see *Keilim* 17:15, 19:4, and the corresponding comments of Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 251.

It is difficult to determine the intended and actual impact of this work on the generations that followed given the lack of introduction to the work and of concrete evidence as to its subsequent usage. An interesting indication of the perceived import of the work, however, can be gleaned from the introduction to the first publication of the commentary in Venice in 1548. The publisher, Moshe ben Zekhariah Kohen, opens with a laudatory approbation about the greatness of Bertinoro and his work. He describes how Bertinoro:

Opened doors to the belief in God that were closed and laid them with gold... *Especially in the Mishnah for which no Talmud was recorded...* he has demonstrated his might and shed light upon its face in different ways, different aspects and with various explanations. And like we have seen the great benefit for one who travels the path of wisdom...we have attempted with all out power to print it and to merit the masses...

Even in its contemporaneous setting, it appears that the greatest asset of Bertinoro's work was perceived to be his collection of commentaries and discussion upon those tractates for which no Talmud existed.

Rather than sever ties from the Gemara and present the Mishnah as a work worthy of independent study, his commentary may, in fact, have had the opposite intent and effect. In the words of Joel Zaiman, "Bertinoro was probably well aware that one of the functions of his commentary was to reattach the Mishnah to the Gemara, and once again render it impossible to study the Mishnah independently of the Talmud. Though now printed in separate editions, so that technically it was easier to study Mishnah independently, the apparatus provided to facilitate such study, that is Bertinoro's commentary, once again made the Mishnah subservient to the Talmud."²⁶ While

²⁶ Joel H. Zaiman, "The Traditional Study of the Mishnah," in *The Modern Study of the Mishnah*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 7.

providing a useful tool for those wishing to engage in study of the Mishnah, it appears that Bertinoro's work did not intend to effect any fundamental shift in the way in which Mishnah was studied and perceived.

Nevertheless, despite the limited innovation of Bertinoro's commentary on Mishnah, the work may have contributed to a modest incorporation of Mishnah study into the *yeshiva* curriculum. According to Ronit Meroz, "Until the end of the 15th century, Mishnah was pushed to the periphery of study in the *yeshivot*. In Jerusalem, in the first half of the 16th century, we find an arousal in this matter, possibly in the wake of the printing of the Mishnah with the commentary of the Rambam in 1492 [in Naples] and maybe because of the work of R' Obadiah of Bertinoro, explicator of the Mishnah, in Jerusalem at the time."²⁷ Students in Jerusalem in 1521, just a few years after the passing of Bertinoro, recorded that "We learned the entire Talmud in order, with Rashi and the French Tosafists...every morning, and during the evening one chapter of Mishnah and one chapter of Rambam."²⁸ The commentary of Bertinoro also began to spread, first published in Venice in 1548 and subsequently in numerous editions including prints in both Lublin and Prague in 1595.²⁹

What emerges from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries then is a slow return to the study of Mishnah catalyzed by a number of factors. Important among these was the invention of the printing press in the 1430s by Johannes Gutenberg. With the first printing of the Mishnah as an independent work in 1485 in Spain, the Mishnah

²⁷ Ronit Meroz, "Haburat R' Moshe ben Makhir," *Pe'amim* 31, (1987), 45-47.

²⁸ Simhah Assaf, *Mekorot Le-Toldot Ha-Hinukh Be-Yisra'el*, vol. III, (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at D'vir, 1930-54), 10. See Mordechai Breuer, *Ohole Torah: Ha-Yeshivah, Tavnitah Ve-Toldoteha*, (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisra'el, 2003), 131.

²⁹ Vinograd, *Otsar ha-sefer ha-Ivri*.

became accessible independent of the Talmud. This first printing of the Mishnah was followed soon after by the printing of the Mishnah with Maimonides' commentary in 1492 by the Soncino family in Naples, making Mishnah study more comprehensible to the average student. Finally, Bertinoro's comprehensive commentary on the Mishnah was completed in Jerusalem, which further encouraged Mishnah study and made it intelligible to a wider audience.

Though Mishnah study never was abandoned completely by students in the land of Israel and in Italy, and may even have seen a slight increase in the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century in these regions, there was little deviation from the *status quo* that had prevailed for hundreds of years: the Talmud still occupied its position of dominance for students of all ages. It was not until the mid-sixteenth century and onward that the world of Mishnah study truly underwent a revolution. In the span of the next two hundred years, no less than twenty comprehensive Mishnah commentaries would be written, in contrast to the two that had been written in the 500+ years before.³⁰ Mishnah study would become a staple of every Jewish curriculum, and a newfound pursuit of even the leading scholars. Where did this sudden revival come from? What value was appreciated in Mishnah that drove its rapid rise in importance? Who were the figures that were responsible for this revitalization?

The answer to these questions can be found by studying two religiously and geographically distinct groups of this time period. The first was a group of prominent kabbalists in Safed whose study of Mishnah prompted entirely new conceptions of the value and significance of the Mishnaic corpus. The second was a group of rabbis in

³⁰ See Section IV below for a comprehensive list of these commentaries.

Ashkenazic lands, exemplified by Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel of Prague, better known as the Maharal, who revived the study of Mishnah within a more traditional, *yeshiva* setting. The remainder of this paper will explore the background and nature of the revitalization that the study of Mishnah underwent in these two distinct settings, and its long-lasting consequences for the future.

II. The Revival of Mishnah Study in the Early Modern Era: The Kabbalists of Safed

The *Zohar*, the central text of Jewish mysticism, written in the late thirteenth century, already accords the Mishnah certain sanctity. The *Zohar* is a book of teachings purported to date back to the Mishnaic era to the famous Jewish mystical teacher, R' Shimon bar Yohai (mid-second century C.E.). Framed as a commentary on the Torah, it embarks on thematic mystical discussions on many topics throughout the Biblical text. In its commentary to *Bereishit*, the *Zohar* asserts the unique value of the Mishnah, writing “He who reads and reviews the Six Orders of Mishnah, is one who knows how to organize and tie together the unity of the Master properly. These are the ones who sanctify the holy name of their Master every day.”³¹ It was not until the mid-fifteenth century, however, that the centrality of this concept for the kabbalists became embedded in practice.

Safed emerged as the center of the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One of the first great kabbalists of Safed was the renowned R' Joseph Karo (1488–1575), most famous for his groundbreaking law code the *Shulkhan Arukh*, but also regarded as an important scholar and teacher of the Kabbalah. A study of

³¹ *Sefer ha-Zohar*, (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1970), *Bereishit* 42a.

Karo's mystical practices, and his Kabbalistic work *Maggid Mesharim*, provides one of the first examples of a newfound prominence accorded to Mishnah study. While most of his works, most famously the *Shulkhan Arukh*, the *Kesef Mishnah*, a commentary to *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides, and the *Beit Yosef*, a commentary to the *Arba'ah Turim* of R' Yaakov ben Asher (1270-1340) of Spain are of a strictly legal nature, *Maggid Mesharim* is an important exception.

Maggid Mesharim is a personal diary that Karo recorded over the course of fifty years, describing his encounters with a heavenly *Maggid* (mentor.) In contrast to the rest of his works, according to Solomon Schechter, "in the whole of the *Maggid Mesharim* there are only a few lines of a legal nature. Karo was sober enough not to allow his mystical proclivities to have a marked influence upon his judgments in matters of law. What occupied his thoughts in these moments of rapture was chiefly the mysteries of the Torah, as well as matters of conduct..."³² The book serves as a unique revelation of the mystical side of Karo, not observed in any of his halakhic writing.

Throughout the work, Karo describes his discussions and interactions with the *Maggid*. This mystical being, however, did not appear to Karo involuntarily or at random; revelation of the *Maggid* was invoked by study of the Mishnah. In numerous places throughout the work, he records how he would study Mishnah at a certain time of the day in order to open communication with the *Maggid*. Every time Karo recited Mishnayot, "the *Maggid* appeared to him and people would hear his voice through the door or at the back of the house saying: 'Peace upon thee, Rabbi Joseph Karo. I am the

³² Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. II, (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2003), 214-5.214.

Mishnah which thou hast studied. I came forth to teach thee understanding.’”³³ The *Maggid* then was nothing less than the personification of the soul and spirit of the Mishnah. The wisdom and true meaning of the Mishnah was revealed to Karo through the supernatural conduit of a *Maggid*.

The *Maggid* would appear to Karo while he was in a conscious state, and after the communication Karo would record their dialogue. The contents of the *Maggid*'s revelations are diverse, and range from discussions of kabbalistic mysteries and doctrine to personal advice and even chastisement. The *Maggid* urges Karo to live a simple and ascetic life, and criticizes him when he falls short. As the manifestation of the spirit of the Mishnah, the *Maggid* encourages Karo in his study of Mishnah and speaks of its tremendous value. On one occasion, after Karo falls asleep in the middle of a Mishnah recitation, the *Maggid* appears and proclaims:

But always cleave unto me, unto my fear, unto my Torah, unto my Mishnayot...thou hast slept like a sluggard...and didst not rise to recite Mishnayot as thou art wont to do...Yet by the merits of the six orders of the Mishnah which thou knowest by heart...it has been decided in the Celestial Academy that I return to speak unto thee as before, not to leave thee and not to forsake thee.³⁴

This utterance of the *Maggid* reveals two important aspects involving the Mishnah: first, the acknowledgement that study of the Mishnah has intrinsic and unique merit, and second, that Karo knew the entirety of the six orders of Mishnah by heart.

Before exploring the historical background and importance of these two elements of Mishnah among Karo's contemporaries and pupils in Safed, two other comments of the *Maggid* in relation to Mishnah warrant mention. Karo's knowledge of the Mishnah by

³³ R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 17.

³⁴ Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 258.

heart was not merely an indication of his diligence and profound wisdom; it was an essential component of Mishnah study. As the *Maggid* himself acknowledges, “These are the holy days of Nisan, and you have hallowed them even more by studying the Mishnah by heart; thus you have restored the crown to its ancient splendor by making [the Mishnah again] to be the ‘Oral Torah.’”³⁵ A fundamental component of the Mishnah is the fact that it was conceived and intended as an *oral* tradition.

To understand the “ancient splendor” to which the *Maggid* refers, the background of the Mishnah must be briefly recounted. Initially, the teachings of the *Tannaim*, the authors of the Mishnah, were recorded merely as memory aids.³⁶ At the end of the second century C.E., however, due to the exigencies of persecution that faced the Jewish people, the Mishnah was compiled and composed into its current form by R’ Judah ha-Nasi.³⁷ Nonetheless, Jewish scholars throughout time recognized the integral value of maintaining the Mishnah as an oral tradition. R’ Joseph Albo (c. 1380–1444) of Spain provides one explanation of the significance in his *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*. He posits that there is a fundamental need for the traditions to remain oral, noting that, “The law of God cannot be complete so as to be sufficiently comprehensive for all times. New details are continually occurring in the affairs men in their customs and their actions, too numerous to be contained in a book. Therefore, Moses was given orally on Sinai some general principles, alluded to in the Written Torah in brief, to be used by the sages of every

³⁵ Joseph Karo, *Maggid Mesharim*, (Vilna: Y.L. Lipman, 1875), 47b.

³⁶ See Sherira ben Hanina Gaon, *Igeret Rav Sherira Gaon: `im targum meduyak li-leshon ha-kodesh be-fa`am rishonah*, ed. Natan David Rabinowitz (Jerusalem : H. Vagshal, 1991).

³⁷ Cf. *Gittin* 60a:

דר' יוחנן ור"ש בן לקיש מעייני בספרא דאגדתא בשבתא, והא לא ניתן ליכתב! אלא כיון דלא אפשר – (תהלים קי"ט) עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך, ה"נ כיון דלא אפשר – עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך.

generation to deduce the new particulars.”³⁸ The Oral Torah, according to Albo, is fundamentally *oral* because this is the key to maintaining the flexibility of Jewish Law and to ensuring its continued applicability throughout the future of the Jewish people. It is this tradition and legacy that the *Maggid* was praising Karo for restoring by his memorization of the Mishnah.

A final point, which appears in passing in the *Maggid Mesharim*, sheds light on the historical reality of the time. In his encouragement of Karo’s Mishnah study, the *Maggid* highlights the fact that “nowadays they that study her are few...”³⁹ This assertion of the *Maggid* accentuates the minimal role that learning of Mishnah played in the *yeshivot* until then even in Israel. Given this description, the increased popularity of Mishnah study within the kabbalistic circles in these years is all the more striking.

It is noteworthy that already during Karo’s lifetime he began to expose others to his study of Mishnah as well. A famous account to this effect was recorded by R’ Shlomo Alkabetz (c. 1500-1580), one of the great kabbalistic contemporaries of Karo famous for his composition of the mystical song *Lekha dodi*. Describing a late-night prayer vigil that he joined at Karo’s house, he writes:

No sooner had we studied two tractates of the Mishnah then our Creator smote us so that we heard a voice speaking out of the mouth of the saint [Karo], may his light shine. It was a loud voice with letters clearly enunciated. All the companions heard the voice but were unable to understand what was said. It was an exceedingly pleasant voice, becoming increasingly strong. We all fell upon our faces and none of us had any spirit left in him because of our great dread and awe.⁴⁰

³⁸ Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-`Ikarim*, vol. III, (Philadelphia, 1930), ch. 23.

³⁹ Karo, *Maggid Mesharim*, 17a.

⁴⁰ Louis Jacobs, *The Schocken Book of Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1997), 24.

It emerges that Karo's *Maggid* spoke through his own mouth and was known by, and audible to, others of his contemporaries. More than that, however, this account demonstrates that great scholars like Karo and Alkabetz dedicated time solely to the study of Mishnah.

This mystical practice of Karo, studying Mishnah to initiate revelation from a heavenly *Maggid* was explored further and refined by a later contemporary of his, R' Hayyim Vital (1543-1620). Vital was the most prominent student of the great kabbalist R' Isaac Luria (1534-1572), better known as the Ari, and the leading promulgator of his mystical thought. Vital recorded a personal diary, titled *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* (The Book of Visions), in which he reveals and records his deep interest in magic and mysticism. Among his many mystical pursuits, Vital developed and practiced a unique meditative technique through which he strove to "achieve altered states of consciousness and merit esoteric communications and revelations."⁴¹ The essence of his meditation revolved around recitation of passages in the Mishnah which would facilitate mystical revelations.

In a number of passages in his diary, Vital recorded the specific way in which he used the Mishnah for his meditation. The first record of such an experience comes a year before the death of his master, Isaac Luria:

1571. The New Moon of the month of Iyyar. At the time of the afternoon prayer I secluded myself by means of reading the Mishnah three times as is my custom. And I concentrated upon inquiring: 'Who was my previous incarnation'? I became drowsy and I perceived my teacher...⁴²

⁴¹ Lawrence Fine, "Recitation of Mishnah as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 141, 1982: 185.

⁴² Hayim Vital, *Sefer ha-hezyonot : yomano shel R. Hayim Vital*, ed. Mosheh M. Fayershtain (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi le-ḥeker kehilot Yiśrael ba-Mizrah : Yad Yitshak Ben-Tsevi yeha-Universitah ha-Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 2005), 81.

Vital employed the study of Mishnah to probe his previous incarnations. Upon arousal, he recognized the success of his meditation and returned immediately to recitation of the Mishnah. After a second trance in which he interacts with renowned sages of the past, he relates his visions to his teacher, Luria, who replied: “This is undoubtedly a supernal arousal. However, I do not wish to reveal to you the meaning of these matters, as I do not want you to know the previous incarnation of my soul.”⁴³ Here, as before, the recitation of Mishnah induces a mystical revelation for Vital. Vital used the Mishnah as a vehicle to enter an altered state of consciousness and to probe the esoteric secrets of reincarnation.

Although the significance of Mishnah recitation specifically in inducing these visions is not clear from these first writings, a further trance of Vital sheds light on a possible connection. Later that same month, on the 27th of *Iyyar*, Vital records:

I secluded myself as mentioned above. And I asked myself: “Is the soul of R’ Elazar ben Arakh that is impregnated within me, still impregnated so?” And I cleaved with my soul to his by means of reading the mishnah: “R’ Elazar ben Arakh says: Be eager to study the Torah etc. (*Avot* 2:19). And while I was completely awake with my eyes closed, I saw a group of sages studying Torah. They said to me...”⁴⁴

No longer reciting random *mishnayot* in hope of entering a mystical trance, here Vital sought to connect with a specific *tanna* through the recitation of a mishnah authored by him. It seems from his diary entries that his recitation of Mishnah represents an attempt to communicate with *Tannaim* specifically. In his earlier visions as well, the sages that he saw were Rabban Gamliel, R’ Yohanan ben Zakkai and R’ Eliezer, all *Tannaim* living in the late first century C.E.

⁴³ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

This function of Mishnah is confirmed and developed explicitly in a chapter of his master treatise *Sha'arei Qedushah*, recently published for the first time by Lawrence Fine.⁴⁵ In this chapter, Vital described “practical methods by which to achieve three types of inspiration...” After completing the preparatory steps: seclusion, repentance and removal of impurities, one must “begin with the activities that bring about the [state of] cleaving to the upper realms...according to that which I was able to find in the words of the sages and the words of those who seclude themselves.” Vital, without referencing specific predecessors, acknowledges that his meditation derives from traditional sources. One of the major influences to which Vital alludes clearly is Joseph Karo. In the words of Fine:

It appears that Vital had a deeply ambivalent attitude towards him [Karo.] On the one hand, he extols Karo's greatness and admires his position in the Safed community. At the same time, Vital is concerned with convincing himself that Karo's status is inferior compared to his own potential level of accomplishment. Given the evidence that Karo held an unusually prominent place in Vital's life, it should not be surprising that he was drawn to a contemplative practice quite similar to the one in which that rabbinic master indulged.

It is clear, therefore, that Vital drew inspiration from the mystical practices of Karo, and logical that he continued the practice of Mishnah recitation. It is in this spirit that Vital, after describing the preparatory steps of meditation, writes:

Recite whichever single mishnah that you wish, many times in uninterrupted succession. Concentrate your mind upon attaching your soul to that of the *tanna* mentioned in the mishnah...that your mouth is an instrument which articulates the letters of the text of this mishnah. And that the voice that you produce from the mouth's organ consists of the sparks of your inner soul which emerge and recite this particular mishnah...When you become exhausted from reciting the text of the mishnah—if you are worthy of it—it is possible that the soul of the *tanna* will abide in your mouth, and he will become invested without your mouth while you are

⁴⁵ Ibid., 189-191.

reciting the mishnah. And then while you are still reading the mishnah he will speak with your mouth and offer you a salutation of peace. Everything that you then think of asking him he will answer you.

Vital clearly spells out the centrality of the Mishnah to this meditative practice as a method of communicating with its authors, the *tannaim*. He does not, however, provide an explanation of why he seeks to communicate with the *tannaim* specifically.

A third example of a kabbalist who attributed special mystical powers to the study of Mishnah was R' Elijah de Vidas (1518-1592), another student of Luria's. In his work *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah*, de Vidas writes: "One who maimed his *neshama*, his *tiqqun* [rectification] is learning Torah through the six orders of Mishnah, and not only [for] this but also [for] one who deposits his seed in [i.e. cohabits with] a *niddah*, or a maidservant etc..."⁴⁶ De Vidas introduces here another value of Mishnah, distinct from the revelatory and meditative purposes of Karo and Vital: learning Mishnah as a method of *tiqqun* for a blemished soul.

Why is it that Mishnah specifically became the object of study and interest for kabbalists like Karo, Vital and de Vidas? What newfound significance did study of Mishnah gain in the early sixteenth century that caused Karo to study it and to reveal its spirit, the *Maggid*, Vital to recite it in an effort to communicate with the *tannaim*, and de Vidas to assert its restitutive power in achieving kabbalistic *tiqqun*? Part of the answer to this complex question may lie in the post-Expulsion, Messianic mindset that pervaded Safed in this period. Another may be a reflection of the life-story of a little known figure, R' Joseph Ashkenazi.

⁴⁶ Elijah de Vidas, *Sefer reshit hokhmah*, (Tel-Aviv, 1970), 210 [Sha'ar ha-Kedusha 17].

With the Spanish Expulsion of 1492, the center of Jewish life in Spain was devastated and its inhabitants forced to seek new homes. The Spanish Jews fled to whichever countries would take them, from Portugal and Italy to Turkey and North Africa. In the wake of these terrible calamities, a newfound messianic spirit gripped Jews throughout these communities, convincing them that the end of days was near. As Gershom Scholem describes it, “The birthpangs of the Messianic era, with which history is to ‘end’...were therefore assumed to have set in with the Expulsion.”⁴⁷ According to Aaron Aescoly, “Greater was the yearning for [Messianic] redemption in that generation more so than any other.”⁴⁸ This mentality influenced much of the lives and practices of the Jews in these areas, and transformed their mystical activity and conceptions.⁴⁹ This mindset may also have been one of the factors that contributed to the revival of Mishnah study in Safed. Joseph Karo in particular, who was one of the earliest revivers of Mishnah as we have seen, may have been a product of this post-Expulsion mentality.

Joseph Karo’s family was one of the many thousands of Jewish families forced to flee Spain in 1492. Like many of them, Karo’s family sought refuge in the neighboring country of Portugal. When the Jews were expelled from Portugal as well five years later, Karo’s family moved throughout Greece and Turkey where he spent much of his younger life. It was in this tumultuous stage of his life that Karo first embarked upon the serious study of Mishnah and began to communicate with the *Maggid*. A directive of the

⁴⁷ See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 247.

⁴⁸ Aaron Aescoly, *Tenuot ha-Mishihiyot be-Yisrael*, (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1987), 260.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 244-86. See, however, the more recent arguments of Moshe Idel who disputes the accuracy of Scholem’s claim, and sees the changes in Kabbalah as more gradual and less apocalyptic. According to Idel, they were “not the result of despair, but of a sustained effort by the Sephardi Jews to rebuild their religious and social life in new centers.” (Moshe Idel, “Religion, Thought and Attitudes: the Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews,” in *Spain and the Jews*, ed. Elie Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1992), 136. This important historiographical debate notwithstanding, the messianic fervor of the Safedian kabbalists, irrespective of its origin, is incontrovertible and is presented here accordingly.

Maggid, in fact, was the reason that Karo took upon himself a voyage to Palestine and migrated to Safed in 1535.⁵⁰ What was it about the Mishnah that appealed to messianic kabbalists such as Karo and his contemporaries and disciples in Safed?

As early as the Tannaitic era, the Mishnah was associated already with the redemptive process. A well-known passage in *Vayikra Rabbah*, a Tannaitic *midrash* written on Leviticus, says that “all of these Exiles will not be gathered except for with the merit of Mishnayot.”⁵¹ It is with this basic theme in mind, in an era of destruction and despair, that kabbalists such as Karo embarked on their study of Mishnah. In order to attain a better understanding of the new place of Mishnah in the view of these kabbalists, we will explore briefly some of the mystical connotations they found in the Mishnah.

In kabbalistic thought, the Written Torah represents the *sefirah* (lit. enumeration) of *tiferet*, splendor, which is a manifestation of the male part of the godhead: *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*. The Mishnah, on the other hand, taken as the symbol of the Oral Torah, represents the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, kingdom, and is a manifestation of the female part of the godhead: *Shekhinah*.⁵² The *Shekhinah* is the lowermost *sefirah* and is the “part” of God that went into exile with the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the messianic ideal as expressed in kabbalistic terms is the reunification of the female *Shekhinah* with her husband, *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*. As we will see below, this idea was developed by some of the Safedian kabbalists in advocating the study of Mishnah on the Sabbath, as a way of adorning the “bride,” *Shekhinah*, in preparation for her unification with her male counterpart.

⁵⁰ See Eugene Newman, *Life & Teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*, (London: E. Newman, 1972), 98.

⁵¹ *Midrash Va-yikra rabah*, (Jerusalem: Makor, 1972), 7:3.

⁵² See, for example, Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem, 1945), 1a-b.

In his work *Totsot Hayim*, Elijah de Vidas spells out the role that Mishnah study can serve in this process. “At midnight one should study Mishnah,” he writes. “And the reason is that in Mishnah there is no Exile. Thus, ones intentions [in study] should be to raise the *Shekhinah* from Exile and to unify her with her husband [*Haqadosh Barukh Hu*] using the secret of Oral Torah, which is the Mishnah.”⁵³ This kabbalistic value of *yihud ha-shem*, unification of the godhead, intensified by the post-Expulsion messianic mentality, may have been one of the impetuses for a return to Mishnah study in Safed. It is not coincidental then that Joseph Karo, a direct product of the Spanish Expulsion, was one of the first to begin to preach the value of Mishnah study.

A second explanation of the kabbalistic return to Mishnah study may be seen through a brief sketch of the life of Joseph Ashkenazi (c. 1529-before 1582). Although a few accounts of Ashkenazi’s life had been written previously,⁵⁴ Gershom Scholem composed the most comprehensive picture of Ashkenazi to date.⁵⁵ As Scholem describes him, Ashkenazi was a radical and controversial figure, stirring trouble in all his actions and opinions. His first public involvement was his support of his father-in-law R’ Aharon Land of Moravia, a well-known rabbi in Prague and later in Poznan, in denouncing philosophical study and demanding the study of only traditional Jewish sources. His opponent in this philosophical battle was R’ Abraham Horowitz. Horowitz had gone from Prague to Krakow to study with R’ Moshe Isserles (1520-1572), a renowned Ashkenazic talmudist, halakhist and philosopher, and became attracted to

⁵³ Elijah de Vidas, *Totsot Hayim*, (Jerusalem, 1970), *siman* 66.

⁵⁴ See J. N. Epstein, *Mavo le-nusah ha-Mishnah*, (Jerusalem : Magnes, [1963 or 1964]), 1284-1285, and Tsvi ha-Levi Horowitz, “Toledot R’ Yosef Ashkenazi, ‘ha-Tanna’ mi-Tsfat,” *Sinai* year 4, volume 7: 311-330.

⁵⁵ Gershon Scholem, “Yediot hadashot al R’ Yosef Ashkenazi,” in *Tarbiz* 28, (1958-59): 59-89.

philosophy.⁵⁶ He moved to Poznan for some time, and it was there that he engaged Land and Ashkenazi in philosophical debate around the year 1559. After Land's death the following year, Ashkenazi moved first to Livorno and then settled finally in Safed. It was there, living among the kabbalists of Sephardi origins that he became known as Ashkenazi.

A recently discovered manuscript in Oxford, which Scholem convincingly argues was written by Ashkenazi while in Livorno,⁵⁷ further illustrates his animosity towards philosophy while also revealing his deep involvement in the Kabbalah. Even within Kabbalah, however, he distinguishes between the "true Kabbalah," the authentic traditions of Jewish mysticism, and the "new Kabbalah," Kabbalah that he sees as philosophically-driven corruptions of the authentic traditions. The "true Kabbalah," Ashkenazi explains, is that of the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* (authors of the Gemara), and should be relied upon because "all words of the Torah are explained in them."⁵⁸ In this category of authentic Kabbalah, he includes a number of classical works, including *Sefer ha-Bahir*,⁵⁹ *Sefer ha-Hekhalot*,⁶⁰ *Shiur Komah*⁶¹, *Mishnat Yosef ben Uziel*⁶² and the *Zohar*, which he cites often. In all of these works he sees anti-philosophical positions, and he treats them on par with writings of *Hazal*.

⁵⁶ Later in life, however, Horowitz regrets his earlier support of philosophy and leans more to Kabbalah, which his son, the famous R' Isaiah Horowitz (the SheLaH) follows.

⁵⁷ See Scholem, *Yediot hadashot*, 65-77.

⁵⁸ Scholem, *Yediot hadashot*, 85.

⁵⁹ Believed by the Kabbalists to contain traditions dating back to first century C.E. Suspected by historians to have been written by R' Yitzhak Saggi Nehor in Provence in the thirteenth century. See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 35ff.

⁶⁰ *Sefer ha-Hekhalot* (or 3 Enoch) is purportedly written in the second century C.E., but it probably dates back mostly to the fifth or sixth century C.E. See Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 24.

⁶¹ Written by R' Moses Cordovero in the sixteenth century.

⁶² Of unknown authorship and age, though it already circulated amongst twelfth century German Hasidim (Scholem, *Origins*, 83).

He expresses vociferous opposition to the “New Kabbalists,” on the other hand, who try to compromise between, and reconcile, Kabbalah and philosophy. Among those whom he criticizes are Ramban, Rabbenu Bachya, and Rashba who try to bridge the worlds of philosophy and Kabbalah. He strongly castigates these rabbis, writing:

Who permitted them to fabricate new beliefs? But here they have overpowered me, for with them is a great majority and with them are golden calves, that is the reason that they have made for themselves...and they cast aside the priests of God, the sons of the Living Lord, that is Rashi and Tosafot and the like, and also the *Aggadot* and *Sefer ha-Zohar* and the entirety of the *Kabbalah*, and they make for themselves priests from foreign nations—Aristotle and his companions may their memories be erased—and became priests to a non-God.⁶³

Shortly thereafter, maybe because of his unpopular opinions in the philosophically enlightened milieu of Italy, Ashkenazi left Livorno and settled in Safed. Despite his proclivity for stirring up controversy, which persisted in Safed, it was there that he turned his focus to a new passion for which he would long be remembered: the study of Mishnah. Ashkenazi collected ancient Mishnah manuscripts and carefully edited the text and vowelization of the entire Mishnah. He also affixed to it an ancient tune that he discovered written on one of the manuscripts, and gained renown for his melodious chanting of the Mishnah. For his involvement and mastery of the Mishnah, he came to be known as *ha-Tanna ha-Elohi*, the “great [lit. divine] Tanna.” According to R’ Shimshon Bak who arrived in Safed in 1582 after Ashkenazi’s death, “There is none left in Israel with his piety and knowledge of Talmud [i.e. Bavli] and Yerushalmi, and he knew all six orders of Mishnah by heart...”⁶⁴

The impact of Ashkenazi’s study of Mishnah was not limited to his own study and mastery. He is known to have engaged other leading kabbalists in Safed in his study, including his younger contemporary, R’ Isaac Luria. An interesting account of their

⁶³ Scholem, *Yediot hadashot*, 87.

⁶⁴ Horowitz, *Toledot R’ Yosef Ashkenazi*, 329.

regular joint study of Mishnah appears in *Shivḥe ha-Ari*, a book of tales recorded between 1607-1609 by R' Solomon Shlomel of Dreznitz, Czechoslovakia who was visiting in Safed. "And so it occurred," he writes, "that one Friday night he [Luria] entered the house of our master and teacher R' Joseph Ashkenazi...and they were reviewing *mishnayot* by heart, for such was their custom always."⁶⁵ Similarly, R' Hayyim Vital cites numerous teachings that he heard from Ashkenazi himself.⁶⁶

How can this transition in Ashkenazi's life, from the strident critique of many leading Jewish scholars for their philosophical tendencies in his early years to his deep involvement in the Mishnah later on, be explained? Perhaps Ashkenazi saw in the Mishnah deep kabbalistic meaning and significance which drove him to an intense study of and fixation upon it. As discussed earlier, Ashkenazi venerates the work of the "true Kabbalah," those works that he sees rooted in the authentic traditions of the *Tannaim*. Maybe as a reaction to the external influences on the "New Kabbalah" that he ardently denounces, central among which was the encroachment of secular philosophy, he retreated into the very heart of the "authentic Jewish tradition"—the Mishnah of the *Tannaim* itself. This may have been influenced by the significance imbued to Mishnah study by Joseph Karo before him, and it may have been Ashkenazi who was an important influence on the Mishnah study of kabbalists after him: starting with his contemporary Luria, and continuing with Luria's students from Vital and beyond. He also had a significant influence on the important Mishnah commentator R' Solomon Adeni (1567-1625?), as will be discussed below.

⁶⁵ R.S. Shelomel, *Sefer Shivḥe ha-Arizal he-ḥadash*, (Yerushalayim : Mekhon Ḥelakh le-oraita, 2005), 78.

⁶⁶ See Scholem, *Yediot hadashot*, 61.

This perspective on the deep kabbalistic significance of Mishnah may explain a sweeping turn towards study of Mishnah among leading scholars in Safed in the sixteenth century. The study of Mishnah came to be stressed as a crucial element of regular study and extended beyond the specific mystical purposes seen earlier in the practices of Karo and Vital. One of the most important figures in Safedian Kabbalah, and a prominent student of both Karo and Alkabetz, was R' Moses Cordovero (1522–1570). Cordovero spent much of his life studying the various trends in kabbalistic thought that had developed until his time and working to synthesize them into an integrated speculative kabbalistic system. Like many of the kabbalists of his time, Cordovero initiated and instituted various new customs throughout his daily life, and records were made of the unique *Hanhagot ha-RaMaK*, the customs of R' Moses Cordovero. Cordovero clearly gained an appreciation for the Mishnah and its significance from his two great teachers, and in this list of important activities are a number relating specifically to the Mishnah: “To learn every Friday night Mishnayot according to his ability. To review weekly all the Mishnayot that he knows. To learn weekly at least two chapters of Mishnayot by heart.”⁶⁷ In addition to the emphasis he places on memorization of Mishnah, following the lead of Karo, he also focuses on the study of Mishnah on the Sabbath.

The connection between the Sabbath and the study of Mishnah was expanded upon by Cordovero's student, R' Abraham Galante. In the *Hanhagot* recorded in Galante's name, one finds that he developed a regimen for the study of Mishnah on the Sabbath. “Friday night read eight chapters of Mishnah *Shabbat*, eight in the morning, and eight at

⁶⁷ Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. II, 294.

Mincha, because this was the intention of Rabbenu haKadosh [Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi] to set up the twenty-four chapters in *Shabbat* corresponding to the twenty-four bridal ornaments.”⁶⁸ The mystical significance of these bridal ornaments, as discussed above, relates to the preparation of the *Shekhinah* to unite with her husband, *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*. Galante here provides even more explicit insight into the perceived value of Mishnah study for kabbalistic purposes.

This tradition of Mishnah study continues with a second disciple of Cordovero, the famous kabbalist R’ Isaac Luria, the Ari. In the work *Tikkune Shabbat*, authored either by the Ari himself or by his disciple R’ Abraham Berukhim (c. 1515-1593), this idea of studying the Mishnayot of tractate *Shabbat* on the Sabbath is reiterated in a slightly different manner. “Before every meal [on the Sabbath] one should learn eight chapters of Mishnah from tractate *Shabbat* which contain the twenty-four adornments of the bride...”⁶⁹ The Ari frames his study of Mishnah around meals, rather than parts of the Sabbath day, but the ideal of structured study of Mishnah is identical.

A further attestation of the extent that Mishnah study became integrated into the mainstream kabbalistic curriculum can be seen in a number of statements recorded by other kabbalists in Safed. At the end of the list of *Hanhagot* of R’ Berukhim, he notes that “Most masters of Torah learn Mishnah by heart, while some learn two orders and some three etc.”⁷⁰ In a group of *tiqqunim v’hanhagot* sent by the Safedian kabbalists to Morocco and other communities outside of Israel in 1576, a similar ideal is advocated, positing that “There are some masters of Torah who know the six orders of Mishnah by

⁶⁸ Ibid., 297.

⁶⁹ *Tikkune Shabbat of the Arizal*. See Efraim Urbach, “Mishmarot u-Moadot,” *Tarbiz* 42, (1972-73): 309-313.

⁷⁰ Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. II, 297.

heart, and some [know] three, and the majority [know] one order.”⁷¹ This revolution of Mishnah study that began in Safed was now being spread to other centers of Judaism in the world.

Finally, R’ Moses ben Makhir, a colleague of Luria and Rosh Yeshiva in Safed, asserted the educational value of Mishnah study not just for scholars but even for young children. In his *Seder ha-Yom*, an important work on the daily customs of the Safed community, he wrote a brief excursus on the Mishnah in *Avot* (5:21) which details the age-appropriate education of children. The Mishnah states: “He used to say: At five years of age [the study of] Scripture; At ten [the study of] Mishnah; At thirteen [subject to] the commandments; At fifteen [the study of] Talmud etc.” Commenting on “at ten [the study of] Mishnah...at fifteen [the study of] Talmud,” Ben Makhir writes:

They gave him five years [i.e. from age 10-15] because they knew that in five years it is possible to learn it in a nice and eloquent manner by heart, to the point where he only needs to review it occasionally in the future. And so we see with our eyes, that if a youth of this age engages in them properly, he will undoubtedly succeed if he dedicates himself solely to this purpose.⁷²

The curricular advice of this Mishnah, which had been minimized for so many centuries during which the Mishnah had been neglected, gained new force in Ben Makhir’s advocacy of every child knowing the entire Mishnah by heart. This pedagogic function of the Mishnah coincides with the concurrent revolution in Mishnah study in Ashkenaz sparked by the Maharal, which will be explored below.

What emerges is that for some of the leading kabbalistic figures in sixteenth-century Safed, starting with Karo and continuing with Ashkenazi, Cordovero, Ben

⁷¹ Jacob Moses Toledano, *Otsar genazim : osef igrot le-toldot Erets Yiśrael mi-tokh kitve-yad atikim im mevo’ot ye-he’arot*, (Jerusalem : Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1960), 51 (*siman* 19).

⁷² Moses ben Makhir, *Sefer Seder HaYom*, (Jerusalem: 1968/1969), 97.

Makhir, Luria and his disciples, Mishnah found a place in the center of their regular study schedule and educational purview. The Mishnah gained newfound use and purpose, ranging from providing a source for meditative contemplation, to serving as a conduit for the kabbalistic ideal of *tiqqun*, to representing a basis pedagogic tool for youth education. The Mishnah was extricated anew from the bonds of the Talmud, and restored to a place of independent prominence.

III. The Revival of Mishnah Study in the Early Modern Era: The Maharal and his Followers in Ashkenaz

While the Kabbalists in sixteenth-century Safed were adopting the Mishnah for their own mystical purposes, a parallel revival in Mishnah study was brewing in Ashkenaz. A culturally and religiously distinct community of Jews lived in the Ashkenazic lands, a broad region including Germany and Poland, with their own sets of unique customs and practices. Throughout the Middle Ages, the place of Mishnah was negligible in the educational philosophy of these Ashkenazic Jews. The regimented education in place in the *hederim* (schools for young children until age 13) and *yeshivot* (schools for older children) placed no emphasis on a study or knowledge of Mishnah.

This picture changed significantly when Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525-1609), the Maharal, became a dominant figure in the Ashkenazic world in the mid-sixteenth century. The Maharal championed a complete restructuring of the traditional educational curriculum that prevailed in sixteenth century Ashkenaz. Of central importance was the revival of Mishnah study through his writings and teachings that revitalized the role of Mishnah in the traditional *yeshiva* setting for generations. As we

will see, within the Maharal's own lifetime many great scholars testified to new study groups that were formed under the Maharal's direction, dedicated to the study of Mishnah. Leading rabbinic contemporaries of the Maharal begin to extol the value of Mishnah study and knowledge, crediting the Maharal with beginning the revolution. Finally, a descendant of his in the late seventeenth century testifies to the chain of tradition that he received regarding the prime importance of the Mishnah, providing evidence for the longevity of the Maharal's efforts.

What spurred the Maharal's interest in overhauling the traditional curriculum of Ashkenaz? Where did the Maharal's specific attraction to Mishnah come from? How did the writings and teachings of the Maharal affect his contemporaries and Ashkenazic society as a whole in the generations that followed?

To understand properly the revolution in Mishnah study begun by the Maharal and its context, the educational setup of Ashkenazic schooling must be reviewed. As was the case with Christians, Jewish children learned not topically but according to the texts which formed the center of their curriculum. They had no formal linguistic training, learning instead to read Hebrew from the *siddur* (prayerbook), without even understanding the meaning of the words.⁷³ Only after beginning Torah study did they learn to translate the Hebrew text, word by word, into their own language. The Torah learning that took place focused on the weekly portion, and used Rashi as an important reference in translation.

However, this learning of Torah was just a preparation for the "true" learning, the Talmud with its commentaries. Even though this would be the essence of the learning in

⁷³ Assaf, *Mekorot* I: 101, 139; IV: 78. Cf. Isidore Fishman, *The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe From the End of the 16th to the End of the 18th Century*, (London, 1944), 44.

the *yeshivot*, already in *heder* parents wanted the children to begin learning Talmud, starting as early as the age of seven or eight. Talmud was considered the pinnacle of Jewish intellectual scholarship, and parents in Ashkenaz were eager for their children to embrace it from the earliest ages. Children were rushed into learning Gemara with Rashi and especially Tosafot, which was considered the climax of intellectual pursuit for the *heder*. Even *pilpul*, the practice of intense and nuanced textual analysis, made its way into the young students' *heder*.⁷⁴

As this push for children to study Talmud from the youngest ages intensified, pedagogic problems emerged. The Talmud was not intended for youth with little to no background. They would be hard-pressed to follow the complicated questions and answers; they were not familiar with many of the laws underlying Talmudic discussions, and they would now be forced to learn an entirely new language, Aramaic, in addition to Hebrew which they only recently began to comprehend. This approach therefore, was difficult and unproductive for the general Jewish populace. As Aharon Kleinberger writes, it was “directed to the venerated ideal of the *Talmid Hakham* without consideration for the limited intellectual capabilities of the average children, and the fundamental religious needs of the Jewish masses.”⁷⁵ Particularly noteworthy in this educational curriculum is the complete neglect of Mishnah study in an organized fashion. There was no learning of the basic principles of Jewish law which were assumed to be assimilated along the way in pursuit of higher learning.

⁷⁴ Aharon Fritz Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit shel ha-MaHaRaL*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1962), 21-24.

⁷⁵ Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 22.

Upon reaching the *yeshivot*, learning time was split in half: half the year the students learned Gemara, Rashi, Tosafot and *pilpul*, and half the year they learned Halakhah with its codifiers and commentators. This bifurcation of learning Gemara and learning practical Halakhah, led to the *pilpul* losing its pragmatic significance. Instead, it became solely a fulfillment of the obligation to learn Torah and turned into an exercise in wit and sharpening the mind in pursuit of intellectual creativity.⁷⁶ This *pilpul* turned into the focus of *yeshiva* education and led to intellectual battles and the development of far-flung questions and complex answers just to prove intellectual capacity and sharpness.⁷⁷ The latter focus, *pilpul*, became so central that it was a prerequisite for becoming a Rav or Rosh Yeshiva to demonstrate *hilukkim* (nuanced casuistry.)⁷⁸

This deviation from proper pedagogical methods in favor of the pursuit of *pilpul* caused significant problems in the educational system. Because the learning was not properly tailored towards children, teachers had to resort to fear and threats to induce children to learn. They administered regular exams with corporal and emotional punishments for those who did not perform as expected. Alternatively, teachers used sweets and presents to encourage study.⁷⁹ The teachers themselves were pushed towards this educational approach as they were sponsored by the parents of the children, and thus the greater prestige the children earned through their “higher level” studies, the more the parents were impressed and satisfied.

It was to this educational background that the Maharal reacted and against which he took a critical stand. He denounced his contemporaries, writing:

⁷⁶ Assaf, *Mekorot* I: 62-3, 65, 111, 124, 154, 167.

⁷⁷ Assaf, *Mekorot* I: 111, 118, 125, 129, 130.

⁷⁸ Assaf, *Mekorot* I: 62-3, 118-9, 128, 160, 167; IV: 81.

⁷⁹ Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 27.

The foolish in these lands: their ways are backwards...they climb ladders to expound matters in vain, they expend their energies for naught, and their days will end in vanity, and their years in futility, engaging in *pilpul* of vanity, to explain matters which are not, gathering wind in their hands, and it becomes wind of falsehood in their mouths...⁸⁰

In response, he sought no less than a complete revamping and restructuring of the educational curriculum. According to the Maharal, while learning Torah is the most significant intellectual pursuit, its primary purpose is “the ways of man, how he should behave and how he should direct his deeds.”⁸¹ As such, the primary focus in learning, he argued, should be Halakhic material; learning should, first and foremost, be for the purpose of practice.⁸² By stressing the pragmatic value that should direct children’s learning, the Maharal was denouncing the contemporaneous practice of “learning for its own sake,” and learning for the sake of honor and intellectual recognition. He lamented the deficit in Halakhic knowledge that plagued his generation, the need to go searching for the law in the *Shulkhan Arukh* because they were not sufficiently fluent themselves. The Maharal demanded mastery of the material, not merely the ability to look up the law in the “dead animal skins upon which the Torah is written.”⁸³

While the Maharal sought to reorganize the entire school curriculum to fulfill his pedagogic vision and to alleviate the problems he perceived, his ideas about the Mishnah emerged as his most significant educational reforms and were the ones that had the greatest impact. The Maharal saw the elevation of *pilpul* as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement as the leading educational obstacle of his generation, which he calls “a

⁸⁰ Judah Loew, *Gur Aryeh*, (Bene Beraḥ: Hotsa’ at Yahadut, 1971), 5:40-41.

⁸¹ Judah Loew, *Netivot ‘Olam*, (London: Honig, 1961), *Netiv ha-Torah* 1:3a.

⁸² Ibid. 1:4b, 15:27b. See Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 130 n. 2 for further references.

⁸³ Loew, *Netivot ‘Olam*, *Netiv ha-Torah* 4:10a-b, 5:11b. See Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 132 n. 14 for further references.

lowly and impoverished generation who walk in twisted ways...”⁸⁴ His virulent opposition to *pilpul* was two-fold. First, he objected to the manner of *pilpul* that was practiced in the Ashkenazic *yeshivot*. True and legitimate *pilpul*, as he describes it, involves a pursuit of halakhic truth with nuanced discussions serving to sharpen that knowledge to establish the proper Halakhah. Without this end in mind, *pilpul* becomes just a game of intellectual gymnastics. It does not represent the true goals of Torah: to direct the Jew to good and fitting deeds. It lacks the element of *`al menat la`asot*, [learning] “in order to perform.”⁸⁵

The second objection of the Maharal to the students of *pilpul*, was the ulterior motives that drove their learning. He denounced them as merely seeking to prove their intellectual prowess and to win the casuistic battles to gain honor and recognition. Learning became an activity of egoism resulting in exploitation of the Torah for peoples’ own benefits.

The Maharal’s pedagogic solution was to promote the study of Mishnah, “the great foundation and iron pillar of the entire Torah.”⁸⁶ The Mishnah, according to the Maharal, is the ideal text for fulfilling his vision of Halakhah-centric didactics and one that was sorely neglected in the Ashkenazic educational tradition. “The Mishnah,” he writes “is called the essence of the *mitzvot*, how one should perform them. Learning of the Mishnah leads to action, for one who knows the fundamental laws can perform the *mitzvot*. Therefore, the Mishnah is called ‘a guardian’ for it guards one who studies it to

⁸⁴ Loew, Judah. *Derush al ha-Torah*.

⁸⁵ See Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 138-140.

⁸⁶ Loew, *Gur Aryeh*, 5:40-41.

perform the *mitzvot*.”⁸⁷ The Mishnah’s value lies in its concise codification of the basic laws of Jewish practice. In Kleinberger’s words, the Mishnah for the Maharal illustrates “how one should perform the essence of *mitzvot*, without consideration of their reasons and delving into their significance. It represents, in an archetypical manner, knowledge that is preserved in the memory, as is necessary for the proper and commanded behavior.”⁸⁸

This emphasis upon the importance of Mishnah study was truly revolutionary in the Ashkenazic society in which the Maharal lived. As he personally testified in a long passage bemoaning the downfalls of his generation:

There is not one of us who seeks to retain his learning through review, whether the Torah, the Mishnah or the Talmud. And in truth, there is no need to even mention Mishnah [in this context] for to it they altogether pay no attention, and we do not heed the words of the sages in *Sanhedrin* 99a: “‘For he despised the word of God etc.’ (Numbers 15:31) Rabbi Natan says [verse this refers to] ‘anyone who does not heed the Mishnah.’” And this is the very essence of this generation’s actions, that no one heeds Mishnah for he says that he will not be called wise, except through the Talmud which is *pilpul* and debate. Man’s heart is drawn after this and he neglects the Mishnah, and therefore it states “for he despised the word of God.” And this is because “the word of God” refers to the body of *mitzvot* which is taught in the Mishnah. Therefore, one who does not heed the Mishnah, about him it says “for he despised the word of God” for his learning is only for the purpose of wisdom. Every man by nature seeks to grow wise, and he does not seek to know the *mitzvot* of God themselves, which is the Mishnah.⁸⁹

The Maharal is arguing for a complete overturning of the traditional conception of the rabbinic texts, and a shift in the textual hierarchy to include a prominent place for Mishnah.

The value of Talmud, however, is not as unequivocal for the Maharal, as its pursuit is more intellectual and less pragmatic and substantive. His ambivalence towards

⁸⁷ Ibid., 5:66.

⁸⁸ Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 135.

⁸⁹ Judah Loew, *Derekh Hayim*, (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 2004), 303.

Talmud can be seen in a comment to a mishnah in *Kiddushin* (1:10). The mishnah says: “Anyone involved in the study of *Miqra* and Mishnah and in [the practice of] ethical behavior will not readily sin, as it says ‘the three-ply cord is not easily severed etc.’ (Ecclesiastes 4:12)” After a philosophical discussion of the value of *Miqra* and Mishnah, the Maharal writes “and that which they did not mention Talmud, which is generally included with *Miqra* and Mishnah, this is because via *Miqra* and Mishnah comes action, but Talmud has no bearing upon this matter for it is *pilpul* alone.”⁹⁰ The Maharal, in his mission to divert the educational focus from *pilpul* and bolster the study of Mishnah, effectively undermines the prevalent conception of Talmudic dominance in favor of *Miqra* and Mishnah.

For Talmud to be a valuable endeavor, argues the Maharal, it must be pursued in the proper manner. A thorough proficiency in Mishnah, he writes, should be the foundation upon which all subsequent study of Talmud is built. It is only once this base is constructed and solidified, that “one who wants to engage in the holy work, the Talmud, will then be able to build a tower whose tip is in the sky, without a pebble falling earthwards, for it will all stand on the established foundation, that is the Mishnah.”⁹¹

It is noteworthy in this context, that this curricular sequence espoused by the Maharal is one of the areas in which his thought has been compared to that of the great Christian pedagogue, Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670).⁹² Comenius, in his book

⁹⁰ Loew, *Netivot Olam, Netiv ha-Torah*, 2:247.

⁹¹ Loew, *Gur Aryeh*, 40-41.

⁹² See Kleinberger, *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit*, 138-9, 148ff. For a broader discussion of this comparison, see Otto D. Kulka, “Comenius and Maharal: The Historical Background of the Parallels in their Teachings,” *Judaica Bohemiae* 27: 1-2 (1992): 17-30.

Didactica Magna,⁹³ writes that teachers must present the “substance” before the “form.” They must first teach knowledge of the material itself and then the logical principles that comprise and structure it. Just as Comenius writes that informational knowledge must be acquired before dialectical sharpness can be sought, the Maharal encourages mastery of Mishnah, before entry into Talmud.

What emerges from the teachings of the Maharal is a radical proposition to restructure the educational curriculum in Ashkenaz with the study of Mishnah coming to occupy a central focus. To complete this picture, a few suggestions can be made as to why the Maharal in particular was the first to critique and then to revitalize the Ashkenazic educational curriculum.

One possibility is an encounter of Ashkenazic Jews with Sephardic Jews after the Spanish Expulsion in 1492. As discussed earlier, there was a strong tradition of Mishnah study for youth among Sephardic Jews that was bolstered by the commentary of Bertinoro in the late fifteenth century. The Maharal was born in Poznan, Poland to a distinguished family of scholars who originated in Worms. The Maharal’s brother, R’ Hayim, studied Hebrew grammar and Bible with the commentary of Rashi in a thorough and organized fashion under the tutelage of a Sephardic immigrant, Rabbi Isaac Sephardi.⁹⁴ This stood in contrast to the mainstream Ashkenazic education, which, as discussed earlier, omitted the study of grammar completely and included Bible study in a rushed and truncated manner. While it is not known who the teachers of the Maharal were, R’ Isaac or similar teachers of Sephardic descent might have had a comparable

⁹³ Johann Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, trans. M. W. Keatinge (London: A. and C. Black 1917-1921), Ch. 16: 11-19, 30:4-5.

⁹⁴ Newman, *Life & Teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*, 97. See also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition s.v. “Hayyim ben Bezalel.”

influence on the Maharal regarding Mishnah study, more in line with the Sephardic traditions and pedagogy.

Another possible influence suggested by Joseph Davis in his work on a leading student of the Maharal, R' Yom Tov Lipmann Heller,⁹⁵ is a new worldview that prevailed in this era. Davis posits that one of the impetuses for the Maharal's revival of Mishnah study and subsequently, Heller's famous Mishnah commentary *Tosafot Yom Tov*, was an ideal that emerged from the European Renaissance. The European Renaissance involved a rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman literature and profound new interest in their study. Similarly, Davis argues, in Ashkenaz, the Jews under the leadership of the Maharal were excited by discovery of unknown or neglected ancient Jewish texts.⁹⁶ The Mishnah falls into this latter category, and the Maharal may have been influenced by this Renaissance ideal. While Davis provides no evidence for this assertion, it certainly is plausible as a factor contributing to the Maharal's revolution given his well-established interest in humanism and other Renaissance ideology.⁹⁷

As alluded to above, the direct effects of the Maharal's efforts can be judged by various statements of contemporary and subsequent scholars in Ashkenazic lands. One of the most important attestations comes in the introduction of R' Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1569-1674) to his Mishnah commentary, *Tosafot Yom Tov*. Heller opens the introduction with a citation from *Baba Metzia* in which Gemara is originally assigned greater importance than Mishnah. The Gemara then relates that the whole world came to

⁹⁵ Joseph Davis, *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller: portrait of a seventeenth-century rabbi*, (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

⁹⁶ Ibid. 66-67. Cf. Newman, *Life & Teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*, 91.

⁹⁷ See Kleinberger, *Ha-Mahashavah ha-pedagogit*, especially Chapter III: "Man in Maharal's System." See also Ben Zion Bokser, *The Mystical Philosophy of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague*, (London: Jason Aronson Inc. 1994), especially p. 17-34.

neglect the Mishnah until R' Judah the Prince taught, "one should always run towards the Mishnah more than towards the Gemara."⁹⁸ "Likewise," writes Heller:

Rabbenu HaGadol, our master and teacher, the *Gaon* Rabbi Yehuda Levai bar Betzalel [the Maharal], may his memory be for the world to come, who occupied himself with the academy, and spread Torah to the masses in the 'largest measure,'⁹⁹ which is the manner of Gemara as is well known, returned and taught to 'run towards the Mishnah', until study societies formed, group by group, 'who are the kings, the kings are the rabbis.'¹⁰⁰ These groups involved themselves daily with a chapter of Mishnah, and they repeated this cycle. And this was from God, a 'decree not to be passed over.'¹⁰¹ Not only in the holy community of Prague, in which the 'law was set'¹⁰² by the aforementioned *Gaon*. For even in the other holy communities, near and far, 'they established and accepted upon themselves'¹⁰³ to teach them [i.e. the Mishnayot] in Israel...

Heller testifies to the creation of study societies formed under the direction of his teacher, the Maharal, which engaged daily in the study of Mishnah. The Maharal's harsh critique of the educational system was thus more than mere rhetoric and he personally organized groups to embark on his mission of renewed Mishnah study.

A second important figure who discussed and endorsed the achievements of the Maharal was his younger contemporary R' Ephraim Solomon of Luntschitz (Leczyca, Poland, 1550-1619), a well-known scholar, preacher and later rabbi of Prague, best known for his homiletic Biblical commentary, *Keli Yaqar*. In his work of *mussar*, 'Amude Shesh, R' Ephraim wrote a section entitled *Mussar Amud ha-Torah*, the *mussar* of the pillar of Torah. He began by describing the need to fix the pillar of Torah by revitalizing the curriculum, and emphasized the need for good, honest teachers. His proposed curricular changes, akin to those of the Maharal, involved a return to the ancient

⁹⁸ BT *Baba Metzia* 33b.

⁹⁹ This terminology is a direct citation from the aforementioned passage in *Baba Metzia* 33b.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Gittin* 62a

¹⁰¹ Cf. Psalms 148:6

¹⁰² Cf. Esther 3:15

¹⁰³ Cf. Esther 9:27

model of the Mishnah in *Avot* (5:21): Torah, then Mishnah and then Gemara. Like

Heller, he credited the Maharal specifically with the reform in Mishnah, writing:

I have returned and seen the great benefit that emerges from Mishnah study that the *Gaon*, our Rabbi and Master Rabbi Liv may his memory be blessed [the Maharal], established here in the holy community of Prague in every house of prayer. To learn in *havruta* (study pairs) after prayer one chapter, and the reward is very great.¹⁰⁴

R' Ephraim then elaborated upon the achievements of the Maharal, adding two additional important aspects:

And another great benefit emerged from this, for the laymen, whose intellectual ability does not enable them to learn *Halakhah* daily...at least they will be able to learn a chapter of Mishnah daily. Therefore, I too say, and declare and agree to strengthen this establishment with great fortitude and power, especially now that the work *Tosafot Yom Tov* has been written on the Mishnayot, which satisfies all who read it. Therefore, every God-fearing man should take this to heart and learn *Mishnayot*, and so too in every city, the holy communities...should also establish this practice for it is great.

Likewise, in regards to the teaching of the youth I have already written that the essence of their learning immediately after *Miqra* should be Mishnah, and no God-fearing man, who wishes to teach his son and benefit him with a good outcome, should not begin by teaching his son Gemara until the youth learns and knows the orders of Mishnah, at least those that are relevant nowadays.

R' Ephraim emphasized the importance of the Maharal's mission on two planes: first, learning Mishnah is a necessary stage in the educational process for children, contrary to the ubiquitous Ashkenazic practice of skipping straight to Talmud. Second, even beyond childhood, the Maharal's revival of Mishnah study gives laymen, unable to engage in the intricacies of Talmud, an outlet for serious and meaningful Torah study.

Finally, generations later, the eminent scholar and kabbalist R' Yair Bacharach (1638–1702) described the tremendous value of Mishnah study. Bacharach was a direct

¹⁰⁴ Ephraim Solomon ben Aaron of Luntshits, *'Amude Shesh*, (Prague: Mosheh ben Yosef Betsalel mehokek, 1617).

descendant of the Maharal, educated by a number of teachers who had studied under disciples of the Maharal.¹⁰⁵ Bacharach, in fact, named his magnum opus *Havvat Yair* after his grandmother *Havvah*, the granddaughter of the Maharal. In *Havvat Yair*, he described the study of Mishnah as:

A great [endeavor] that one should study regularly with his child when he is first able to read Halakhah. In most of *Sha*'s he should learn with him a chapter of Mishnah a day, and in the difficult and lengthy sections, half of a chapter. And he should be diligent that the child constantly reviews them without negligence or weariness, and he will easily be able to learn them...and this will be of great benefit for all of his studies.¹⁰⁶

Bacharach described how his teachers studied this way with him, and likewise, the *gedolei 'olam ha-qadmonim*, the giant scholars of yore. He writes that this tradition was confirmed by his father-in-law, R' Sussmann Brilin of Fulda, who had a similar tradition of the importance of Mishnah study dating back several generations. Through this testimony of Bacharach, the direct impact of the Maharal's revival of Mishnah is evident even generations later.

While the kabbalists in Safed were plumbing the esoteric depths of the Mishnah and using it as a tool for mystical revelation and elevation, the Maharal created a new pedagogic legacy for Mishnah in the lands of Ashkenaz. Both in its capacity as an introductory text to ground children's knowledge of Jewish law, and in its value as a text accessible to the laymen adult population, the Mishnah rose to new heights in the Ashkenazic world at the end of the sixteenth century.

IV. The Effect of the Revivals on Mishnah Study

¹⁰⁵ For more information on his familial lineage and education, see David Kaufmann, "Jair Chayim Bacharach: A Biographical Sketch," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2. (1891): 292-313.

¹⁰⁶ Jair Hayyim Bacharach, *Havot Yair*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1698), *responsum* 124.

A number of effects emerged in the wake of the two revivals in Mishnah study discussed at length in this paper. The first is a crossover in traditions that created transitional figures who combined elements of both populations, Safedians and Ashkenazim, in their advocacy of Mishnah study. Second, is initiation of a sustained tradition of Mishnah study in the communities discussed, along with increased study in a number of other communities. Third, is publication of countless number of Mishnah editions across the world in the centuries that follow. Last, is the profusion of Mishnah commentaries written in the centuries following, further reflecting the increased popularity of Mishnah. We will briefly explore these four effects in summarizing the revival of Mishnah study in the early modern era.

R' Abraham Horowitz (c. 1550–1615) was a contemporary of the Maharal who moved from Prague to Poland to study with a number of leading sages, including R' Solomon ben Judah of Krakow, author of the *Levush*, R' Meir of Lublin better known as the Maharam, and R' Joshua Falk, a well known Polish Talmudist. Six years after the death of the Maharal, his ethical will *Yesh Noḥalin* was published with glosses of his son R' Jacob (d. 1622), a student of the Maharal. In one of these comments, R' Jacob writes:

I have come to warn and command you, that in addition to the rest of the Talmud that you will learn, learn also Mishnah daily...and all the days of your lives review the Miqra and Mishnah...and how good many times over if you train yourselves that the orders of Mishnah will be fluent in your mouths, and you will be experts by heart, for they are truly called *Torah Sh'be'al Peh*...Truly, the essence of learning is by heart, and praiseworthy is he who does so, for it is a great thing...¹⁰⁷

In this passage, Jacob Horowitz shows himself to be an avid adherent of the Maharal's Mishnah revolution.

¹⁰⁷ Abraham Horowitz, *Yesh Noḥalin*, (Prague: Defus Avraham Lemburgir, 1615), 30a.

R' Isaiah Horowitz (c. 1565-1630), the renowned author of *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit*, was the second son of Abraham Horowitz. Isaiah Horowitz grew up and was educated in Poland, and then took a number of rabbinical positions first in Frankfurt am Main in 1606, then in his birthplace Prague in 1614 after the expulsion of the Jews from Frankfurt, and finally in Jerusalem in 1621. While in Israel, he was influenced greatly by manuscripts of the three great kabbalists Joseph Karo, Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria, whom he calls "those three outstanding saints ... truly angels of the Lord of Hosts."¹⁰⁸ Their influence clearly penetrated his teachings and works, culminating in his composition of *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit* while in Israel.

The multi-faceted background and interests of Isaiah Horowitz distinguish him as an important transitional figure between the educational advocacy of Mishnah study of the Maharal and the kabbalistic meaning and importance imbued by the kabbalists. Evidence of the effect that these combined traditions had on Horowitz's view of Mishnah can be seen in his disproportionate emphasis upon its study: in numerous places in *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit* he stresses how one should know all six orders by heart. "Man," he writes, "should study and review the Mishnah continually...happy is he who is privileged to know the Six Orders of the Mishnah by heart, because thereby man makes a ladder for his soul on which he advances to the highest degree, the sign being that the letters of *Mishnah* correspond to the letters of *Neshamah*, soul."¹⁰⁹ The kabbalistic influence upon

¹⁰⁸ See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition, s.v. Horowitz, Isaiah ben Abraham Ha-Levi.

¹⁰⁹ Isaiah Horowitz, *Sefer Shene Luhot Ha-Berit* [SheLaH], vol. I, (Warsaw, 1862), 181b. See also Assaf, *Mekorot*, I 66. Also I 61-3, 68-70, 89-91, 126-7.

his conception in this passage is clear, as it is in his description of the Mishnah as the crown of Oral Torah, which can cause a great *Tikkun* for all Israel.¹¹⁰

The influence of Horowitz's Ashkenazic roots can also be detected however, as he discusses the importance of the Mishnah for halakhic purposes as well. He advocated study of the commentaries of Maimonides and Bertinoro because "they explain the Mishnah according to the decision of the Talmud and also give the final Halakhic ruling."¹¹¹ Notably, he also wrote an approbation to *Tosafot Yom Tov*, the great commentary of the Maharal's student Yom Tov Lipmann Heller.

Another figure who reflects the influences of both the Safedian and Ashkenazic innovations in Mishnah study is R' Moses Hagiz (1672-1751), best known for his opposition to Sabbateanism and conflict with the Sabbatean Nehemiah Hayon.¹¹² Hagiz was born in Jerusalem and educated by his grandfather Moses Galante, a student of Moses Cordovero and brother of Abraham Galante, (whose *hanhagot* regarding Mishnah study were discussed above.) He was a controversial figure and traveled through many countries and communities in his life, including Prague, on his way to Amsterdam where he collaborated with the chief rabbi, Zvi Ashkenazi on his anti-Sabbatean diatribe. Despite passing through these Ashkenazic communities a century after the death of the Maharal, the curricular priorities established by the Maharal had a clear effect on this prominent kabbalistic figure. In 1733, Hagiz published his *magnum opus*, *Mishnat Hakhamim*, the purpose of which was to "address the crisis of faith that beset Jewish

¹¹⁰ Horowitz, *SheLaH* I, 181b: "And the Mishnah is the crown of the Oral Torah and by its hand a great *tiqqun* can emerge...all of the redemptions of Israel awaken from above to shine and provide their strength below." See Newman, *Life & Teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*, 99-100.

¹¹¹ Horowitz, *SheLaH* *ibid.*, Newman, *Life & Teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*, *ibid.*

¹¹² See Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

society in the early modern period...in two immanent developments in the Jewish world: Sabbateanism...and the Marrano complex.”¹¹³ In a discussion of Mishnah, Hagiz writes:

It is fitting that a person should make learning Mishnayot more of a priority than *pilpul*...first learn and then understand. For after a student has advanced in his knowledge of Mishnah, the door will be open to whatever he desires, and this is a device for approaching the ‘battles of Torah’, which is Talmud...And being that the letters of MiShNaH=NeShaMaH, there is no doubt that it brings one to the World to Come.¹¹⁴

This formulation, prioritizing mastery of Mishnah over *pilpul* and conceiving of it as a foundation for future Torah scholarship, unmistakably hearkens back to the ideology of the Maharal. His conception of Mishnah, however, is intertwined with kabbalistic ideas as well, evident in his citation of the well-known letter equivalence between the words *neshamah* and *mishnah*.

Furthermore, Hagiz echoes the ideal espoused by Karo and propagated through the generations (including Isaiah Horowitz, as we have just seen,) of learning by heart. “Praiseworthy,” he writes, “is he who can learn it [the Mishnah] by heart, until it is fluent in his hands with its explanation.” He even relates how some teachers provided monetary incentives for pupils to memorize *Mishnayot* and he records how “there were some who succeeded, and some who succeeded in part.” Hagiz’s view of Mishnah, like that of Isaiah Horowitz, thus illustrates the influence that the two revivals of Mishnah continued to have, and exemplifies a figure who served as a crossroad between two important cultures.

Although it is difficult to judge the sustained effect of the revival of Mishnah study in the sixteenth century in Prague and Safed, a few later accounts shed some light.

¹¹³ Ibid., 257.

¹¹⁴ Moses Hagiz, *Mishnat Hakhamim*, (Wandsbeck: 1733), Ha-Ma’alah ha-13 *B’Miqrā b’Mishnah*.

R' Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz (c. 1590-1660), the son of Isaiah Horowitz, was a rabbi in various Ashkenazic communities, including Prague, Frankfurt am Main and Poznan. In 1652, he published his father's work *Sheni Luhot ha-Berit* and wrote *Vave ha-Amudim* as an introduction. In this introduction, he describes his journeys and writes:

I have also seen that learning of Mishnayot has spread in Prague, and the intention of those who instituted it is to learn so that the Mishnah is fluent in their mouths, and they instituted it in the *Beit ha-Knesset* so that it will not be quickly forgotten. And their primary intention was for Mishnayot to be learned after the conclusion of prayers...¹¹⁵

A broader picture can be seen in the account of R' Samuel Aboab (1610-1694), a prominent Italian rabbi who published *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, a treatise on ethical conduct, anonymously in Venice in 1650. In this work, he recorded that:

In our generations, there are those who sit the students for extended periods in learning of Miqra, and there are those who sprint straight to Gemara, and there are those who learn first Mishnah with its explanations by heart, as they do in Israel and other places, and this is the proper way...¹¹⁶

Although Aboab does not specify which communities he intends with each of these categories, this description testifies to the variegated traditions that persisted in his time. The first category describes many of the Sephardic communities, including Spain and Italy. The second includes the traditional Ashkenazic communities, seemingly those that had not been influenced by the Maharal. The final category, which he supports, was that of the communities in Israel and "other places." Although this is the most ambiguous category, based on the evidence adduced thus far, Prague seems to be the quintessential example. His inclusion of "others" in this category may indicate the existence of other

¹¹⁵ Assaf, *Mekorot* I, 71.

¹¹⁶ Samuel ben Abraham Aboab, *Sefer Ha-Zikhronot: Asarah Zikhronot Medinim*, (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 2001), Chapter 6 of *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, 55b-56b.

communities who adopted the Mishnah study practices of the communities in Israel and Prague.

One such community in which Mishnah study gained great prominence was Amsterdam. According to R' Sheftel Horowitz, who passed through Amsterdam on his journey, the educational system in Amsterdam followed the system advocated by the Maharal based on the Mishnah in *Avot* (5:21): Torah, Mishnah and then Talmud. He was very impressed with their curriculum and cried, "Why can't this be done in our lands?! If only such a custom would spread to all areas of Israel. And what damage would this cause to first fill one's belly with Miqra and Mishnah until the age of thirteen, and [only] afterwards begin to learn Talmud..."¹¹⁷

Further evidence of the prominence accorded to Mishnah study in Amsterdam is the edition published by Menasseh ben Israel in Amsterdam in 1631. The subtitle for the edition indicates its unique value in that it is "in a small volume, in order that it may be carried in the bosom to be studied, eighteen chapters daily, in order that one may complete the entire Six Orders monthly."¹¹⁸ This is one of the most extreme formulations in support of Mishnah study, advocating a monthly review of the entire *Sha"r Mishnayot*.

Another noteworthy testimony comes from the foreword of R' Yisrael Getz to the version of Mishnah that he printed in 1703 in Venice:

I have merited and learned the Six Orders of Mishnah by heart with the commentary of Rabbenu Moshe bar Maimon [Maimonides] and *Tosafot Yom Tov*...Praiseworthy is the eye that has seen all this in the holy community of Venice the splendid...The vast majority of the wise men of the city know the Six Orders by heart, and learn it constantly...And all the wise men of Venice know the Six Orders of Mishnah with its proper pronunciation and vowelization which they read and review every month.

¹¹⁷ Assaf, *Mekorot* I, 70.

¹¹⁸ In total, there are 524 chapters of Mishnah. Learning 18 chapters a day in a 29 day month would result in 522 chapters learned, and in a 30 day month 540 chapters.

It is clear from these later writings, that the study of Mishnah not only had been sustained, but also gained traction and proliferated in the centuries that followed.

A final example that sheds light on the extent and longevity of the Mishnah revolution in certain communities is the singular and almost shocking testimony of R' Solomon Katz of Pinsk in his work *Halakhah Pesukah* (Shklov, 1787). Here, in the heart of the Lithuanian communities renowned for their Talmudic prowess, R' Katz writes in his introduction:

In these generations, the *minhag* have [*sic*] spread in all corners of Israel to learn Mishnayot daily in an established manner [to the extent] that many forsake the learning of Gemara (!). There reason and logic is with them, in their statements that the Gaon R' Obadiah of Bertinoro and Tosafot Yom Tov who explained the Mishnah gathered all the bottom lines of the Gemara in abbreviated form. Thus, one who learns Mishnah with its commentary is considered as if he has learned Mishnah with the Gemara.

Thus, the study of Mishnah, accompanied by its important commentaries, is shown to have risen to true prominence in all locations of Jewish scholarship for centuries to follow.

Two other indicators reflect the spread of Mishnah study in the centuries that followed. The first is the popular demand for printed copies of the Mishnah, which can be gauged by looking at the geographic distribution and print history of the book. Second, is the scholarly interest in the Mishnah, which can be assessed by examining the quantity and scope of commentaries that were written in this period.

The first edition of the Mishnah was printed in Spain in 1485. In the three centuries that followed, countless editions of the Mishnah were printed across the world

in unique settings and formats.¹¹⁹ Multiple editions were published in cities throughout England,¹²⁰ Italy,¹²¹ Germany,¹²² the Netherlands,¹²³ the Austrian Monarchy,¹²⁴ the Ottoman Empire,¹²⁵ Poland,¹²⁶ Ukraine,¹²⁷ and Russia.¹²⁸ In many of the cities, it was one of the first books to be printed. In a few cities in which there was prolific printing and keen interest in the Mishnah, such as Amsterdam and Venice, a new edition was published nearly every decade. These data point to an important role that the Mishnah, printed independently of the Talmud, played in Jewish scholarship in the centuries following the revival.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from a survey of the Mishnah commentaries written following the revolutions described above.¹²⁹ While the commentaries of Bertinoro and Heller were the best known, most utilized, and most frequently published, the proliferation of other Mishnah commentaries in the centuries that followed is astounding. Commentaries of numerous types, catering to specific groups and audiences were written and published. Moreover, while many of them had only limited publication histories, some were reprinted numerous times in various countries and editions. No comprehensive list of Mishnah commentaries published in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries has been compiled to date, so the following pages contain a brief

¹¹⁹ The following list was compiled with the aid of Vinograd's *Otsar ha-Sefer ha-Ivri*. See full listing in Appendix A.

¹²⁰ Oxford

¹²¹ Livorno (Leghorn), Mantua, Naples, Pisa, Riva de Trento, Venice

¹²² Altona, Berlin, Frankfurt on the Oder, Furth, Lemberg, Offenbach, Sulzbach, Wilhermsdorf

¹²³ Amsterdam

¹²⁴ Breslau, Dyhernfurth, Prague, Pressburg

¹²⁵ Constantinople

¹²⁶ Kraków, Krakow, Lublin, Piotrków (Petrikev), Hrodna

¹²⁷ Ostroh, Zhovkva (Zolkiew)

¹²⁸ Mahilyow (Mohilev), Shklou (Shklov)

¹²⁹ For full listing of commentaries, see Appendix B.

attempt to do so. Keeping with our approach in the beginning of this paper, we will consider only commentaries written on the Mishnah as a whole, ignoring a number of individual treatises and excurses written on specific tractates.

As discussed previously, the commentary of Bertinoro was primarily a compilation of earlier writings, with a strong focus on the commentaries of Rashi, Maimonides and R' Samson of Sens. In effect, "Bertinoro combined the terse style of the French commentators with the pragmatic orientation of Maimonides, often indicating which opinion in the Mishnah was to be accepted as normative practice."¹³⁰ Bertinoro's commentary was published first in Venice in 1548, and then countless times subsequently across a wide variety of locations. The invention of the printing press had a clear and profound effect on the popularity of Bertinoro's work, and facilitated its inclusion in a vast majority of Mishnah editions published subsequently.

The subsequent revival in Mishnah learning and renewed interest in in-depth study that the Maharal initiated in Ashkenaz, led the Maharal's student Yom Tov Lipman Heller to write his *Tosafot Yom Tov*. As he described in his introduction to the work, Heller wrote his commentary in response to the many problems he found in Bertinoro: matters not addressed at all, explanations that contradicted other authoritative sources, and self-contradictions within the work. He saw his enterprise in relation to Bertinoro as a parallel to the relationship between Rashi and the Tosafists: "Like Tosafot, he offered somewhat longer, less frequent comments [than Rashi/Bertinoro]; he did not comment on every word...Heller quoted frequently from Tosafot. Furthermore, just as Tosafot often

¹³⁰ Jacob J. Schacter, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1988), 162-3.

challenge Rashi's interpretations, so did Heller in many places challenge Bertinoro."¹³¹

Tosafot Yom Tov was published first in Prague in 1615 and like Bertinoro, countless times subsequently. These two commentaries, often printed hand-in-hand, propagated the revolution in Mishnah study by providing clear explanations of the Mishnah for beginners, and enough discussion and analysis for more advanced students.

Another important commentary, published a few years after the *Tosafot Yom Tov*, was the *Melekheth Shlomo* of R' Shlomo Adeni (1567-1625?). Adeni was born in Yemen and then moved with his family to Safed where he studied under the great talmudist R' Bezalel Ashkenazi and the kabbalist R' Hayim Vital. It is there that he was influenced by the Safedian Mishnah revival, and embarked on his commentary. In his work, Adeni exhibits considerable critical ability and analyzes the Mishnah on the basis of numerous commentaries and manuscripts that he had collected. In particular, he cites many explanations and textual emendations in the name of R' Joseph Ashkenazi, the "great Tanna" discussed previously.¹³² A fascinating characteristic of the work also highlights the rapidity with which these new Mishnah commentaries spread. Although he finished writing his work before the publishing of *Tosafot Yom Tov*, he was so impressed with Heller's work that he incorporated selections of it into his own work before publicizing his own work.¹³³ Nonetheless, despite the great importance of the work, reaffirmed by Manasseh ben Israel (1604-1657) who based his critical edition of the Mishnah in 1631 upon it, the work was not printed until 1905.

¹³¹ Davis, *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller*, 79.

¹³² Albeck, *Mavo la-Mishnah*, 252.

¹³³ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition. s.v. Adeni, Solomon Bar Joshua.

A figure who followed a similar path was a third contemporary of Heller and Adeni, R' Abraham Azulai (c. 1570-1643). Born in Fez, Morocco, Azulai migrated to Palestine at the age of 45 where he studied under Cordovero and Vital. He too was swept up by the revival of Mishnah and was in the midst of writing his own commentary when he encountered *Tosafot Yom Tov*. He wrote that he was so impressed with the work that his first impulse was to cease his own commentary. Heller, he said, had “toiled and found¹³⁴ and produced greatly without forsaking [even] a small matter etc.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, he found reason to complete his work, and published it under the title *Ahava ba-Ta'anugim*.

During this period as well, Isaac ibn Gabbai, a Talmudic scholar from Livorno, wrote the commentary *Kaf Nahat*. Although the work is little more than a compilation of comments by Rashi and Maimonides on the Mishnah, it attracted interest in Venice and was reproduced frequently. Published first in 1609, the work was republished five times in Venice in the decades that followed, before spreading to other cities such as Amsterdam (1643) and Constantinople (1649).¹³⁶ According to Aharon Ahrend, the reason for this popularity was the unique format of the work, which was published in a small, two-volume edition to enable individuals to study Mishnah while traveling.¹³⁷ The idea for such a format may have arisen from his work as a typesetter for the well-known Bragadini family press in the first part of the seventeenth century, and this position may have facilitated his numerous publications as well. His son, Yedidiah, developed his own

¹³⁴ Cf. BT *Megillah* 6b.

¹³⁵ Dov Zlotnick, “The Commentary of Rabbi Abraham Azulai to the Mishnah,” in *PAAJR* 40, (1972): 153

¹³⁶ Vinograd, *Otsar ha-sefer ha-Ivri ha-Sefarim*

¹³⁷ Aharon Ahrend, “Mishnah Study and Study Groups in Modern Times,” *JSIJ* 3 (2004), <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/3-2004/Ahrend.pdf>.

interest in printing and opened a printing press in Livorno in 1650 in his father's honor, which he called "La Stampa del Kaf Nahat."¹³⁸

In 1631, Menasseh ben Israel published his pocket-sized edition of the Mishnah in Amsterdam. Like its Italian predecessor the *Kaf Nahat*, it was published in two small volumes with a running list of difficult words and their explanations. In describing the value of his edition, Ben Israel writes on the frontispiece, "it adds to the earlier ones true glosses from the Land of Israel and [corrected] *nushaot* (versions), and an explanation of strange words." In his preface, he elaborates, explaining that he consulted the commentary of *Tosafot Yom Tov* in preparing these notes, and used the critical edition of the text prepared by R' Shlomo Adeni.

Many other commentaries of varying natures were written in a wide range of countries. In 1637, R' Moses ben Noah Isaac Lipschutz published his work *Lehem Mishnah* in Cracow,¹³⁹ though little is known about R' Moses and the readership of his work.

In the early 1650s, R' Jacob ben Samuel Hagiz (1620-1674), an Italian scholar and vehement opponent of Shabbetai Zevi, published his commentary *Etz ha-Hayim* in Yedidiah Gabbai's printing press in Livorno. According to Elisheva Carlebach, "Jacob used the commentary of Rashi on the Talmud as a touchstone to create a work which is lucid, concise and intimately familiar with the entire range of pertinent scholarship...The work quickly became so popular that...it formed part of the fixed program of daily study

¹³⁸ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition. s.v. Gabbai

¹³⁹ Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, *Shem ha-Gedolim*, (Livorno, Nella stamperia di Gio. Falorni, 1774), II: 71.

for many of Constantinople's great rabbis."¹⁴⁰ Concurrently, R' Abraham ben Hayim Lisker of Russia composed his *Be'er Abraham* on the Six Orders, though only his commentary on the first three orders was published in the early 1680's in Frankfurt on the Oder.

R' Elisha ben Abraham of Grodno (d. 1749) published his short commentary *Qave-Naqi* in Amsterdam in 1697. Following on the success of *Kaf Nahat*, he published the work in one volume and experienced similar popularity, as judged by its numerous subsequent printings (1698, 1713 etc.)

R' Moses Zacuto (1620-1697), a contemporary of Jacob Hagiz, was a well-known kabbalist and poet who lived first in Amsterdam and then moved throughout Italy. He wrote the kabbalistic commentary *Kol ha-Remez*, which was first published in Amsterdam in 1718. He, like many of the commentators, used Bertinoro and *Tosafot Yom Tov* as a basis for discussion and interpretation, and thus his work serves as both a commentary and a super-commentary.

Another kabbalistic Mishnah commentary, *Ma'aseh Rokeah*, was written in this time period by R' Elazar Rokeah (1665-1742) of Amsterdam. The entire book is infused with kabbalistic ideas, and seeks to reveal the mystical underpinnings of the Mishnah. Rokeah discusses the number and sequence of individual Mishnayot, and the arrangement of the Mishnah as a whole. He lays out his goal clearly in his introduction, writing:

Hazal already said that for the merit of learning Mishnayot one merits the end of days, and clearly they did not intend the simple learning of the Mishnayot. Rather, it is that all the holy words of Hazal, whether in Mishnah or Gemara, it is all in hints and secrets of Torah, secrets of secrets, as is explained in the holy Zohar...

¹⁴⁰ Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 22.

The work was first published two years before his death, 1740 in Amsterdam, and then republished numerous times subsequently in Mahilyow (1817) and in Lemberg (1850, 1853).

In addition to *Ma'aseh Rokeah*, there were a number of other commentaries that were written and published across Europe in the eighteenth century. In 1719, R' Abraham Judah Elijah ben Eliezer Lipman of Minsk published his *'Ir Homah* on the Mishnah in Frankfurt on the Oder. In this work, he discusses the thematic connections that underlie the order of individual *mishnayot* and tractates within the Six Orders.

The 1730's seems to have been an extraordinary decade for the publishing of Mishnah commentaries. The Polish rabbi Isaac ben Jacob Hayyut (1660-1726) wrote a commentary *Zera' Yitshaq*, which was published posthumously in 1732 in Frankfurt on the Oder. The Italian rabbi, kabbalist and poet Raphael Immanuel ben Abraham Hai Ricchi (1688-1743), studied under numerous kabbalists first in Italy and then in Safed, where he completed his Mishnah commentary *Hon 'Ashir*. This work, in which the tractates are interspersed with poems with explanations by the author, was published in Amsterdam in 1731. Also published in Amsterdam in 1731 was *Mishnat Hayim*, a work by a certain Hayim ben Zekharyahu about whom little is known.

Moshe Hagiz (1671-1750), the son of Jacob Hagiz, and his work *Mishnat Hakhamim*, first published in 1733 in Wandsbeck, were discussed earlier. A contemporary of Moshe Hagiz and fellow Mishnah commentator was the illustrious R' Jacob Emden (1697-1776).¹⁴¹ Emden wrote his *Lehem Shamayim* in two stages in Altona, publishing the first two orders in 1733 and the remainder in 1768. It was a

¹⁴¹ For more on the complex relationship between these two figures see Schacter's "Rabbi Jacob Emden," especially 201-202.

complex and multi-faceted work, “as much a critical analysis of the two major commentaries on the Mishnah which preceded his as it is a commentary on the Mishnah itself.”¹⁴² Even more than this, however, Emden often explained Talmudic passages, elaborated on the opinions of various medieval scholars, and launched into long halakhic excurses on various topics in the course of his Mishnah commentary.¹⁴³ In short, Emden used his commentary on Mishnah, his first published work, as a platform for delving into the entire spectrum of rabbinic scholarship and demonstrating his intellectual prowess.

Two further Mishnah commentaries complete the list of those published in the 1730’s. In 1737, Sheniur Feibush ben Jacob published a commentary entitled *Male Kaf Nahat* based on the commentaries of Bertinoro and *Tosafot Yom Tov*. The work was first published in Offenbach, and then again in Berlin in 1832.¹⁴⁴ Last in the decade, in 1739, David Hayyim Corinaldi, an Italian rabbi and author, published his *Bet David* in Amsterdam.

Finally, a number of works were published later in the eighteenth century as well. In 1745, R’ Eliezer Nahum (c. 1653–c. 1746) published his *Hazon Nahum* in Constantinople. Nahum began as a rabbi in Turkey before moving to Jerusalem and being elected as the *rishon l’tzion* (Sephardic chief rabbi.)

In 1752, R’ David Samuel Pardo (1718-1790) published his first work, the Mishnah commentary *Shoshanim L’David* in Venice. Pardo was a Venetian rabbi and poet who traveled and lived in numerous countries before finally settling in Jerusalem in

¹⁴² Schacter, “Rabbi Jacob Emden,” 172.

¹⁴³ See *ibid.* 160-177 for a detailed description and analysis of Emden’s work.

¹⁴⁴ Hermann Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1931), 148.

1782, where he came to be considered one of the city's great rabbis.¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, in his introduction he is critical of contemporary scholars, particularly noting the aforementioned David Corinaldi, which led to tension between the two for many years until he later issued a public apology.¹⁴⁶

In 1770, R' Binyamin Wolf Friedburg published his *Amtahat Binyamin* in Altona, which was a collation of Mishnah commentaries that he edited. In the work, he included the three major Mishnah commentaries—Maimonides, Bertinoro and Heller—accompanied by his own glosses and explanations. Sometime in the late eighteenth century *Sefer Tsava Rav*, a commentary on the Mishnah and on the codes of Jewish law *Arba'ah Turim* and *Shulkhan 'Arukh*, was written by R' Zevi Hirsch Levin (1721-1800). Levin was a well-known nephew of Jacob Emden, who sided with his uncle in the famous Emden-Eybeschuetz Controversy. Levin served as the rabbi of numerous communities across Western Europe, including his position as chief rabbi of the Ashkenazic community in London and later of Berlin. Additionally, his son was R' Saul Berlin, the infamous forger of the responsum *Besamim Rosh*.¹⁴⁷ Levin's commentary was written as marginal glosses on his edition of Mishnah, a 1664 edition published in Amsterdam with the commentaries of both Bertinoro and *Tosafot Yom Tov*. It was not until 1908 that these glosses were first publicized and printed in Piotrków (Petrikev).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Jose Faur, "Introducing the Materials of Sephardic Culture to Contemporary Jewish Studies" in *Sephardic Studies in the University*, ed. Jane S. Berger (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 26.

¹⁴⁶ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition. s.v. Pardo, David Samuel ben Jacob.

¹⁴⁷ See Talya Fishman, "Forging Jewish Memory: *Besamim Rosh* and the Invention of Pre-Emancipation Jewish Culture," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers (Hanover, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ For further elaboration on the story behind this work, see the introduction to the recent reprinting of the work: Zevi Hirsch ben Aryeh Loeb Levin, *Sefer Tsava Rav: Hidushim Ve-Hagahot 'al Shishah Sidre Mishnah Ve-'l Arba'ah Helke Ha-Tur Veha-Shulkhan 'Arukh* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 2002).

Finally, in 1796, R' Meshullam Feibush Horowitz published his *Mishnat Hakhamim* in Ostrog.

What emerges from a survey of Mishnah commentaries published between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries is an astounding revival of scholarly interest in the study of the Mishnah. R' Natan ben Abraham of Palestine, Maimonides and Bertinoro composed the only comprehensive Mishnah commentaries known to us before the sixteenth century. In the wake of the Mishnah revolution in the mid-sixteenth century, however, at least twenty commentaries were published across Europe before the turn of the nineteenth century. Hence, despite the fact that many of these commentaries were, in fact, super-commentaries on Bertinoro and *Tosafot Yom Tov* and saw limited repeat publications, their sheer quantity reflects the deep level of scholarly interest and engagement in the Mishnah that prevailed in this period.

Finally, there was another group of scholars studying Mishnah in this period that warrants mention. Beginning in the seventeenth century there developed among Christian Hebraists a deep interest in the Mishnah. One of the most important of these figures was the Dutch scholar William Surenhusius (1666-1729.) Building upon the work of several earlier Christian studies on Mishnah, Surenhusius translated the entirety of the Mishnah, along with the commentaries of Maimonides and Bertinoro into Latin, which he published in Amsterdam between 1698 and 1703. This tremendous work came as part of a movement among Christian scholars to utilize rabbinic sources to discover Christian truths. As David Ruderman recently described in his *Connecting the Covenants*:

For Surenhusius, the Mishnah was the word of God...The Mishnah especially was part of the divine revelation, offering the key to reconciliation between Jews and

Christians...Through the Mishnah, Christians would be better able to recognize their true faith and Jews would come to understand as well that their rabbinic digest of laws ultimately conveyed a Christian truth...In the end, the ultimate conversion of the Jews would be inaugurated through the efforts of the Christian scholars of Jewish texts.¹⁴⁹

The choice of the Mishnah among the various corpuses of rabbinic text was a logical one. As opposed to study of the Talmud, study of the Mishnah, “served the interests of Christianity in focusing on a work closer to the era of the New Testament. In the study of the Mishnah Christian Hebraists also found a simpler, more accessible, and more straightforward text than kabbalistic and Talmudic ones.”¹⁵⁰

The widespread publication of the famous Jewish commentaries on Mishnah in this era served an integral part in facilitating Christian access to the Mishnah. As another Christian Hebraist, Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724), writes, “If you read the Mishnah you cannot understand it without commentary...Rabbi Yom Tob is the first critical Commentator, and Rabbi Obadiah Bertinora and Rabbi Moses Maimonides both explain the sense intending of the books.”¹⁵¹ Especially without depth and breadth in rabbinic literature and knowledge of the Talmudic expositions of the Mishnah, these commentaries were crucial for the Christians to gain a complete understanding of the Mishnah.

Although there is no evidence that the Jewish and Christian scholars of Mishnah had any direct contact, the parallel efforts that emerge among the groups are fascinating. In the wake of the Mishnah revolution, with increased attention paid to the Mishnah in Jewish academic circles and its publicity augmented by its widespread printing across

¹⁴⁹ David B. Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 75-76.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 77.

Europe along with its commentaries, the Christians too found renewed interest in the work. Given the role of the Jewish commentaries in facilitating this endeavor, it can be argued that Christian study too, at least in part, was an outgrowth of the profound revival in Jewish Mishnah study centered in Safed and Prague that took place in the centuries before.

We have traced in this paper the place of the Mishnah in the intellectual purview of Jewish scholars from the writing of the Talmud through the end of the eighteenth century. After having been neglected for nearly a millennium following the composition of the Talmud, the Mishnah underwent a dramatic revival in the mid-sixteenth century that had prominent and enduring effects. In both Safed and Prague, scholars found value in the study of Mishnah and incorporated it into their ritual practices and educational curricula. In addition, as is evident from the testimonies and publications in the centuries following, the study of Mishnah became an important intellectual pursuit for rabbis and scholars across Europe. Ultimately, it was the mobility of texts, ideas and key individuals in early modern Europe that facilitated this revitalization of the Mishnah. It was also this unique combination of factors that led to the coalescence of these two traditions in continued support of Mishnah study in the generations that followed. After centuries of lying quiescent in the shadow of the Gemara, the Mishnah finally occupied a place of its own on the shelves of Jewish literature.

Acknowledgements

The recently published article by Aharon Ahrend of Bar-Ilan University, “Mishnah Study and Study Groups in Modern Times,” was a useful source for a number of the references cited in this paper. Ahrend briefly raises some of the issues discussed at length in this paper and his collation of sources was a valuable tool in my research.

I would like to thank Andrew Berns, Ph.D. candidate in Jewish History at the University of Pennsylvania, and my father, Dr. Herbert Faleck, for their critical reviews of this work. I would also like to thank Dr. Beth Wenger for her help through the various stages of research and writing and for her review of this paper as well. Finally, I would like to extend a special thank you to my mentor and advisor Dr. David Ruderman for his continual support and guidance throughout the composition of this thesis. Dr. Ruderman provided the initial inspiration for the topic and his historical approach and insights have been invaluable in my work.

Appendix A

The following lists have been compiled from a combination of listings in Vinograd's *Otsar ha-Sefer ha-Ivri* and independent research. While no current database is complete and fully accurate, and there are many discrepancies in names, dates, and places, we have attempted to provide as accurate a picture as possible of the vast printing of the Mishnah and its commentaries.

Virtually every edition of Mishnah after Tosafot Yom Tov's first printing in 1615 included both the commentaries of Bertinoro and Tosafot Yom Tov. Only the exceptions to this general case have been delineated below.

Work	Year	Location Published	Publisher
Mishnah	1485	Spain	
Mishnah (with Perush ha-Mishnah of Maimonides)	1492	Naples	Joshua Solomon Soncino
Mishnah (with Perush ha-Mishnah of Maimonides)	1505	Constantinople	
Mishnah (with Biur Milim and Psaq)	1515	Constantinople	
Mishnah	1542	Krakau	
Mishnah (with Perush ha-Mishnah of Maimonides)	1546	Venice	Marco Antonino Giustiniani
Mishnah (with Bertinoro)	1548	Venice	Parantzoni, Cavarini
Mishnah	1556	Venice	
Mishnah (with Perush ha-Mishnah of Maimonides)	1559	Riva de Trento	
Mishnah (with Psaq Halakhah)	1560	Riva de Trento	Bruin, Antoni
Mishnah	1566	Venice	
Mishnah	1593	Krakau	
Mishnah (with Piske ha-Rambam)	1594	Mantua	Ropinilu, Tumasho
Mishnah (with Bertinoro)	1595	Lublin	Kolonimus ben Mordechai Yaffe
Mishnah (with Bertinoro)	1595	Prague	
Mishnah (with Perush ha-Mishnah of Maimonides)	1606	Venice	
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1609	Venice	Yiovani di Garah
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1614	Venice	Pietro Bragadini
Mishnah (with Tosafot Yom Tov)	1615	Prague	Moshe ben Betzalel Katz
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1617	Venice	
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1625	Venice	Yoani Kaleon

Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1628	Venice	
Mishnah	1631	Amsterdam	Menasseh ben Israel
Mishnah (wiith Niqqud)	1637	Amsterdam	
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1640	Venice	
Mishnah	1643	Krakau	Menahem Nahum ben Moses Mayzlish
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1643	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1644	Amsterdam	
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat Menukkedet)	1644	Constantinople	
Mishnah (Kol Nushaot v'Hagaot)	1646	Amsterdam	Joseph ben Israel
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1649	Constantinople	
Mishnah (with Rashi and Etz ha-Hayim)	1653	Livorno	
Mishnah (with Qav v'Naqi)	1655	Venice	Isaac Gabbai
Mishnah	1656	Venice	Antonio Kalioni, Bragadini
Mishnah (with Kaf Nahat)	1661	Amsterdam	Isaac Gabbai
Mishnah	1664	Amsterdam	David di Kasatro Taratus
Mishnah	1666	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1674	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1676	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1676	Venice	Domingo Vidalgo, Bragadini
Mishnah	1682	Wilhermsdorf	
Mishnah (with Perush of Abraham ben Hayim Lisker)	1683	Frankfurt on the Oder	Yohanan Kristof Buckman
Mishnah	1684	Wilhermsdorf	Isaac ben Judah Yudlish Katz
Mishnah	1685	Amsterdam	David di Kasatro Taratus
Mishnah	1688	Prague	Bnei Yehudah Bak
Mishnah	1697	Amsterdam	Kasper en Antone Sten
Mishnah	1698	Amsterdam	Jacobus Gerardus
Mishnah (with Qav v'Naqi)	1699	Amsterdam	Kasper en Antone Sten
Mishnah	1700	Sulzbach	
Mishnah	1704	Venice	Bragadini
Mishnah (with Qav v'Naqi)	1709	Amsterdam	Kasper en Antone Sten
Mishnah (with Qav v'Naqi)	1713	Amsterdam	Samuel Proops
Mishnah	1714	Wilhermsdorf	Zvi Hersh bem Hayim from Furth
Mishnah	1715	Amsterdam	Samuel Marcus
Mishnah	1716	Amsterdam	Aaron di Shlomo Antunis
Mishnah	1716	Venice	Isaac Gabbai
Mishnah (with Etz ha-Hayim)	1716	Berlin	
Mishnah	1719	Venice	

Mishnah	1721	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1724	Wilhermsdorf	Zvi Hersh bem Hayim from Furth
Mishnah	1725	Sulzbach	
Mishnah (with Perush of Abraham ben Hayim Lisker)	1726	Amsterdam	Moshe Frankfurt
Mishnah	1731	Amsterdam	Moshe Frankfurt
Mishnah	1732	Amsterdam	Samuel Proops
Mishnah	1732	Offenbach	Israel ben Moses
Mishnah	1732	Wilhermsdorf	Zvi Hersh bem Hayim from Furth
Mishnah (with Male Kaf Nahat)	1737	Offenbach	Israel ben Moses
Mishnah	1737	Venice	Baragadin
Mishnah	1739	Amsterdam	Naftali Hertz Levi Rofeh
Mishnah	1740	Zolkiew	
Mishnah	1741	Furth	Hayim ben Zevi Hersh of Furth
Mishnah	1749	Zolkiew	Gershon ben Hayim David
Mishnah	1750	Amsterdam	Naftali Hertz Levi Rofeh
Mishnah	1751	Sulzbach	Meshulam Zalman ben Aharon
Mishnah	1755	Zolkiew	Gershon ben Hayim David
Mishnah	1756	Venice	David ben Solomon Altaras
Mishnah	1759	Sulzbach	Meshulam Zalman ben Aharon
Mishnah	1762	Amsterdam	Naftali Hertz Levi Rofeh
Mishnah	1765	Sulzbach	Aaron and Naftali Bnei Meshulam Zalman
Mishnah	1768	Amsterdam	Kashman ben Yosef Barukh
Mishnah	1774	Amsterdam	Jacob ben Samuel Proops
Mishnah	1774	Zolkiew	David ben Menahem
Mishnah	1776	Mantua	Eliezer Solomon of Italy
Mishnah	1783	Sulzbach	Aharon ben Meshulam Zalman
Mishnah	1791	Livorno	Jacon Nunes & Rafael Mildolah
Mishnah (with Qav v'Naqi)	1792	Hrodna	Barukh ben Yosef
Mishnah	1793	Dyhernfurth	Yehiel Michael May
Mishnah	1797	Offenbach	Tsevi Hirsch Shpits
Mishnah	1797	Dyhernfurth	Rachel & Michael Shimon
Mishnah	1798	Altona	Nathan ben Moses
Mishnah	1799	Amsterdam	
Mishnah	1809	Prague	

Appendix B

Work	Author	Year	Location Published	Publisher
Ahavah ba-Ta'anugim	Abraham Azulai (c. 1570-1643)	NA	NA	
Amtahat Binyamin	Binyamin Wolf Friedburg (late 18th century)	1770	Altona	
Be'er Abraham (with Mishnah)	Abraham ben Hayim Lisker (late 17th century)	1683	Frankfurt on the Oder	Yohanan Kristof Buckman
Be'er Abraham (with Mishnah)		1726	Amsterdam	Moshe Frankfurt
Bertinoro (with Mishnah)	Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro (c. 1450-before 1516)	1548	Venice	Parantzoni, Cavarini
Bertinoro (with Mishnah)		1595	Prague	
Bet David	David Hayim Corinaldi (early 18th century)	1739	Amsterdam	Joseph Dayan
Etz ha-Hayim (with Mishnah and Rashi)	Jacob ben Samuel Hagiz (1620-1674)	1653	Livorno	
Etz ha-Hayim (with Mishnah)		1716	Berlin	
Hazon Nahum	Eliezer Nahum (c. 1653–c. 1746)	1743	Constantinople	Yonah ben Yaakov Ashkenazi
Hon `Ashir	Raphael Immanuel ben Abraham Hai Ricchi (1688-1743)	1716	Venice	Bragadini
Hon `Ashir		1731	Amsterdam	Samuel Proops
`Ir Homah	Abraham Judah Elijah ben Eliezer Lipman of Minsk	1719	Frankfurt on the Oder	Michael Getshalk
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)	Isaac ibn Gabbai (early 17th century)	1609	Venice	Yiovani di Garah
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1614	Venice	Pietro Bragadini
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1617	Venice	
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1625	Venice	Yoani Kaleon
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1628	Venice	
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1640	Venice	
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1643	Amsterdam	
Kaf Nahat Menuqqedet (with Mishnah)		1644	Constantinople	
Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1649	Constantinople	

Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)		1661	Amsterdam	Isaac Gabbai
Kol ha-Remez	Moses Zacuto (1620-1697)	1719	Amsterdam	Samuel Proops
Lehem Mishnah	Moshe ben Noah Isaac Lipshitz	1637	Krakau	
Lehem Shamayim	Jacob Emden (1697-1776)	1733	Altona	Israel ben Abraham
Ma'aseh Rokeah	Elazar Rokeah (1665-1742)	1740	Amsterdam	Joseph Dayan
Ma'aseh Rokeah		1817	Mohilev on the Dniester	
Ma'aseh Rokeah		1850	Lemberg	
Ma'aseh Rokeah		1853	Lemberg	
Male Kaf Nahat (with Mishnah)	Sheniur Feibush ben Jacob (mid 18th century)	1737	Offenbach	Israel ben Moses
Melekheth Shlomo	Shlomo Adeni (1567-1625?)	NA	NA	
Mishnat Hakhamim	Moses Hagiz (1671-1750)	1733	Wandsbeck	Israel ben Abraham
Mishnat Hakhamim	Meshullam Feyvush Horowitz (late 18th century)	1796	Ostrog (Ukraine)	Aaron ben Yonah
Mishnat Hayim	Hayim ben Zekhariah (early 18th century)	1731	Amsterdam	Moshe Frankfurt
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)	Maimonides (1135-1204)	1492	Naples	Soncino
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)		1505	Constantinople	
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)		1546	Venice	Marco Antonino Giustiniani
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)		1559	Riva de Trento	
Pisque ha-Rambam (with Mishnah)		1594	Mantua	Ropinilu, Tumasho
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)		1606	Venice	
Perush ha-Mishnayot (with Mishnah)		1655	Oxford	
Qav v'Naqi (with Mishnah)	Elisha ben Abraham of Grodno (d. 1749)	1655	Venice	Isaac Gabbai
Qav v'Naqi (with Mishnah)		1699	Amsterdam	Kasper en Antone Sten
Qav v'Naqi (with Mishnah)		1709	Amsterdam	Kasper en Antone Sten
Qav v'Naqi (with Mishnah)		1713	Amsterdam	Samuel Proops

Qav v'Naqi (with Mishnah)		1792	Hrodna	Barukh ben Yosef
Shoshanim l'David	David Samuel Pardo (1718-1790)	1752	Venice	Meir da Zara Vindaramin
Tosafot Yom Tov (with Mishnah)	Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1569-1674)	1615	Prague	Moshe ben Betzalel Katz
Tosafot Yom Tov (with Mishnah and Bertinoro)		1643	Krakau	
Zera Yitshak	Isaac ben Jacob Hayyut (1660-1726)	1732	Frankfurt on the Oder	Michael Getshalk

Bibliography

- Aboab, Samuel ben Abraham. *Sefer Ha-Zikhronot: Asarah Zikhronot Medinim*. Jeruslaem: Ahavat Shalom, 2001.
- Aescoly, Aaron. *Tenuot ha-Mishihyot be-Yisrael*. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1987.
- Ahrend, Aharon. "Mishnah Study and Study Groups in Modern Times." JSIJ 3 (2004), <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/3-2004/Ahrend.pdf>.
- Albeck, Chanoch. *Mavo la-Mishnah*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1959.
- Albo, Joseph. *Sefer ha-'Ikarim*. Philadelphia, 1930.
- Artom, M.E. and David, A. *Me-Italyah li-Yerushalayim*. Ramat Gan: The Jerusalem Project, 1997.
- Assaf, Simhah. *Mekorot Le-Toldot Ha-Hinukh Be-Yisra'el*. Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at D'vir, 1930-54.
- Azulai, Hayyim Joseph David. *Shem ha-Gedolim*. Livorno, Nella stamperia di Gio. Falorni, 1774.
- Bacharach, Jair Hayyim. *Havot Yair*. Frankfurt am Main, 1698.
- Ben Aaron, Ephraim Solomon of Luntshits. *'Amude Shesh*. Prague: Mosheh ben Yosef Betsalel mehokek, 1617.
- Ben Makhir, Moshe. *Sefer Seder HaYom*. Jerusalem: 1968/1969.
- Breuer, Mordechai. *Ohole Torah: Ha-Yeshivah, Tavnitah Ve-Toldoteha*. Yerushalayim: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisra'el, 2003.
- Carlebach, Elisheva. *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Comenius, Johann Amos. *The Great Didactic*. Translated by M. W. Keatinge. London: A. and C. Black, 1917-1921.
- Davis, Joseph. *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller : portrait of a seventeenth-century rabbi*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.
- De Vidas, Elijah. *Sefer reshit hokhmah*. Tel-Aviv, 1970.
- De Vidas, Elijah. *Totsot Hayim*. Jerusalem, 1970

Encyclopedia Judaica, 2nd Edition.

Epstein, J. N. *Mavo le-nusah ha-Mishnah*. Jerusalem : Magnes, 1963/4.

Evans, Craig A. *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*.
Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992.

Fine, Lawrence. "Recitation of Mishnah as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A
Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital." *Revue des Etudes Juives*
141, 1982.

Fishman, Isidore. *The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe From the End of
the 16th to the End of the 18th Century*. London, 1944.

Hagiz, Moses. *Mishnat Hakhamim*. Wandsbeck, 1733.

Horowitz, Abraham. *Yesh Nohalin*. Prague: Defus Avraham Lemburgir, 1615.

Horowitz, Tsvi ha-Levi. "Toledot R' Yosef Ashkenazi, 'ha-Tanna' mi-Tsfat." *Sinai* year
4, volume 7.

Ibn Yahya, Gedaliah ben Joseph. *Shalsholet ha-Kabalah*. Venice, 1586.

Idel, Moshe. "Religion, Thought and Attitudes: the Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews."
In *Spain and the Jews*, edited by Elie Kedourie, 123-139. London: Thames and
Hudson Ltd., 1992.

Idel, Moshe. "Seder ha-Limmud of R' Yohanan Alemanno." *Tarbiz* 48, (1979): 303-331.

Jacobs, Louis. *The Schocken Book of Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken
Books, 1997.

Karo, Joseph. *Maggid Mesharim*. Vilna: Y.L. Lipman, 1875.

Kaufmann, David. "Jair Chayim Bacharach: A Biographical Sketch." *The Jewish
Quarterly Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2. (1891): 292-313.

Kleinberger, Aharon Fritz. *Ha-Maḥashavah ha-pedagogit shel ha-MaHaRaL*. Jerusalem:
Magnes Press 1962.

Kulka, Otto D. "Comenius and Maharal: The Historical Background of the Parallels in
their Teachings." *Judaica Bohemiae* 27: 1-2 (1992): 17-30.

Levin, Zevi Hirsch ben Aryeh Loeb. *Sefer Tsava Rav: Hidushim Ve-Hagahot `al Shishah
Sidre Mishnah Ve-`l Arba`ah Helke Ha-Tur Veba-Shulkhan `Arukh*. Jerusalem:
Mekhon Yerushalayim, 2002.

- Loew, Judah. *Derekh Hayim*. Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim 2004.
- Loew, Judah. *Gur Aryeh*. Bene Beraḥ: Hotsa'at Yahadut, 1971.
- Loew, Judah. *Netivot 'Olam*, London: Honig, 1961.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Introduction to the Commentary on Mishnah*. Translation by Zvi Lampel. Judaica Press 1987.
- Meroz, Ronit. "Haburat R' Moshe ben Makhir." *Pe'amim* 31, 1987.
- Midrash Va-yikra rabah*. Jerusalem: Makor, 1972.
- Newman, Eugene. *Life & teachings of Isaiah Horowitz*. London: E. Newman, 1972.
- Ruderman, David B. *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Schacter, Jacob J. "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works." PhD dissertation. Harvard University, 1988.
- Schechter, Solomon. *Studies in Judaism*. New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2003.
- Scholem, Gershom. "Yediot hadashot al R' Yosef Ashkenazi." *Tarbiz* 28, (1958-59): 59-89.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Sefer ha-Zohar*. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1970.
- Shelomel, R.S. *Sefer Shivḥe ha-Arizal he-ḥadash*. Yerushalayim : Mekhon Ḥelakh le-oraita, 2005.
- Silver, Daniel J. *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965.
- Strack, Hermann. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Philadelphia: JPS, 1931.
- Sussman, Yaaqov. "Kitve Yad u-Mesorot Nusah shel Mishnah." *Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*. (1981) 215-250.

- Toledano, Jacob Moses. *Otsar genazim : osef igrot le-toldot Erets Yiśrael mi-tokh kitve-yad atikim im mevo'ot ye-he'arot*. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1960.
- Twersky, Isadore. "The Beginnings of Mishneh Torah Criticism." In *Biblical and Other Studies*, edited by A. Altmann. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Twersky, Isadore. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Twersky, Isadore. *Rabad of Posquières*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Urbach, Efraim. *Ba'ale ha-Tosafot*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980.
- Urbach, Efraim. "Mishmarot u-Moadot." *Tarbiz* 42, (1972-73): 304-327.
- Vinograd, Yeshayahu. *Otsar ha-sefer ha-Ivri* [electronic resource] (Yerushalayim : ha-Makhon le-bibliyografyah memuḥshevet, 2006).
- Vital, Hayyim. *Sefer ha-ḥezyonot : yomano shel R. Ḥayim Vītal*. Edited by Mosheh M.Fayershtain. Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi le-ḥeker kehilot Yiśrael ba-Mizraḥ : Yad Yitshaḥ Ben-Tsevi yeha-Universitah ha-Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 2005.
- Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977.
- Zaiman, Joel H. "The Traditional Study of the Mishnah." In *The Modern Study of the Mishnah*. Edited by Jacob Neusner. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.
- Zlotnick, Dov. "The Commentary of Rabbi Abraham Azulai to the Mishnah." *PAAJR* 40, (1972): 147-68.